APRIL, 1916
VOL. XI. No. 6
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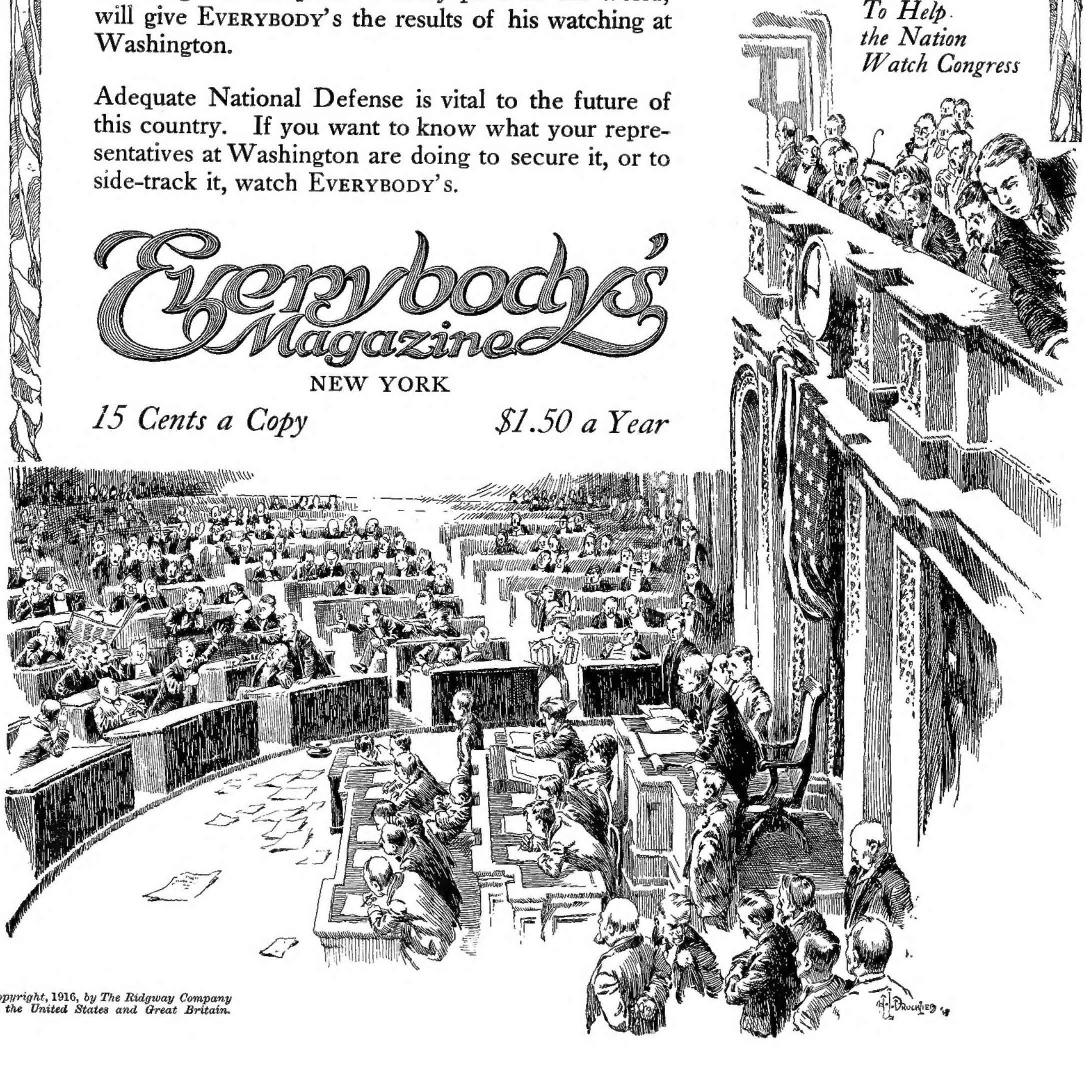

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Vol·XI **Adventure** No·VI

Published by THE RIDGWAY COMPANY
ERMAN J. RIDGWAY, President GEORGE B. MALLON, Secretary and Treasurer
Spring and Macdougal Streets - - New York City
6, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England
Entered at the New York Post Office as Second-Class Matter
ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Managing Editor

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A complete novel of intense human drama. We publish stories of the European war only when they're so good we have to. In this case we were glad of the chance.

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Building up a magazine to the mark you set for it, is the slow work of years. *Adventure* is five and a half years old. Yet only recently have we reached the point where *all* of the stories in an issue are up close to the mark we aim for. In the May number some stories are better than others, but all seem to us so close to the standard aimed for, that we can not give special mention to any one of them. Turn to the last page for their names and authors.

Issued Monthly. Yearly Subscription, $1.50 in advance. Single copy fifteen cents.
Foreign postage, $1.00 additional. Canadian postage, 30 cents.

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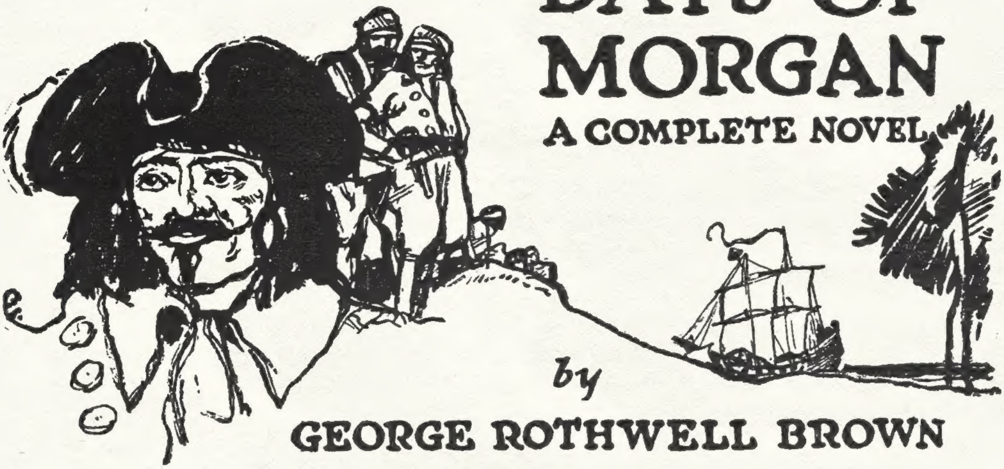
Adventure
Apr. 1916
Vol·11
No 6
Registered in the U. S. Patent Office



DAYS OF MORGAN

A COMPLETE NOVEL

by

GEORGE ROTHWELL BROWN

Author of "Brethren of the Coast."

CHAPTER I

"MONSIEUR LURONNE"

"COME! Come! Chillingworth, I warrant you the maid hath more wit than you give her credit for. You will unnerve her for her task before she makes a fair start, with your doubts and questioning."

"Ay, but she is my daughter, not yours, Sidney," replied Colonel Chillingworth in a low tone, and turning a look of affection upon a slender, blue-eyed stripling who stood on the rug before the fire in front of them. "My daughter! And the journey before her is a long one, bad enough in times of peace; one fraught with many dangers in times such as these. I am almost of a mind to abandon the plan, and go myself."

" 'Twere madness, Chillingworth. Your neck would pay the forfeit, and Mistress Nancy would lose her only parent, and the cause an arm and brain we can not spare. We have threshed it all out—there is no other way."

Colonel Chillingworth threw himself into a low settle by the fire, and buried his head in his hands. There was a moment of silence in the room, and then a girl's voice, laughing silverly.

"She hath more spunk than thou didst show at Marston Moor, I do believe," chuckled his companion. "Really, Chillingworth, upon my honor, I feel quite certain that Mistress Nancy will be in no more danger upon her journey than if she remained here in France, with a cloud of gallants trapesing at her petticoats."

"Much I care for them," interrupted Mistress Nancy, tossing her head, while her father's face darkened.

"Moreover," went on Sidney, "since the message is a verbal one, and she will carry

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no papers, I can not see how she can be compromised. Upon my soul, in that garb she makes as brave-looking a lad as ever I hope to see, and doesn't look a day over nineteen."

"And why should I, pray?" Mistress Nancy tossed her head again. "I am but nineteen, am I not, father?"

Algernon Sidney threw back his head and laughed, and then, like the brave knight and gentleman that he was, made her a courtesy.

"It was but yesterday, dear child," he said, a smile of infinite tenderness in his dark, thoughtful eyes, "that I welcomed you into the world. We remember the night she arrived upon this sorely perplexed planet, back in, let me see—'49, eh, Chillingworth? How time doth fly! And here it is the year of Our Lord 1668—and nothing accomplished yet."

He turned to the window, and in silence stood looking unseeingly at the plump gray cat and the geranium in a pot on the sill, and over and beyond them at the drab sky and the chimney-pots of Lille. The afterglow of an Autumn sunset lighted up his face, a soldierly face, the face of a man who had seen much and done much; the face of a dreamer, too, with those dark eyes looking out calmly upon a troubled world, from beneath arched eyebrows as delicate as a woman's, and a broad, commanding forehead; a patrician face, with something of feminine grace and refinement softening the rugged lines of the man of action. He wore a mustache, and a brown wig, and was dressed, as was Colonel Chillingworth, in brown breeches, without adornment, his coat of the same somber hue set off only by a white cravat.

"Ay, I remember the night well enough," broke in Colonel Chillingworth, taking him by the arm, and leading him from the window. "And also how we sat before the fire waiting for a word from the leech abovestairs—and hoping that it would be a boy."

"Speak for yourself, Colonel," laughed Algernon Sidney, returning to his former mood of gaiety. "I distinctly recall the happy occasion, and remember wishing that it might be a girl, and wagering you a crown that it would be, and, upon my soul I am glad I won, for truth to tell, Colonel, and in all seriousness, I should rather stake my fortunes and those of my beloved country this night upon this slender little maid, who hath the cunning of all her sex, than upon any beardless boy, bragging and blustering about, in Christendom."

"Thank you, General Sidney," smiled Mistress Nancy, dropping him a courtesy with a graceful movement that brought into relief her dainty limbs, encased in crimson stockings and fawn-colored loose breeches.

She wore also a short coat, in the new fashion, slashed in the sleeves to show her white linen, and ribbons everywhere, at the knees, in loops at her waist, and tying the periwig at the ends.

On the back of the settle was a brown riding cloak, and on the table in the middle of the room a broad-brimmed Cavalier's hat, with a sweeping red plume. The latter she adjusted with careless grace.

A rather tall, lank, long-limbed creature, Mistress Nancy had scarcely yet reached the threshold of womanhood. Hers were the delicate and elusive charms of girlish beauty. Smiles lurked in the corners of her wide blue eyes, as if they were half afraid to brave the displeasure of her firm, strong mouth, a mouth so like that of her father, that Sidney, struck by the resemblance, and remembering that eventful day on Marston Moor, when Chillingworth had fought his way to where he lay wounded, and had saved his life, felt steal into his soul an abiding confidence and faith in her, and in the success of the mission upon which they were about to send her.

ABSENT from England at the Restoration, Algernon Sidney had gone in 1659 to Holland to negotiate a treaty between Sweden and Denmark, nor had he been back home since then. In the Low Countries he had vainly sought aid for the movement to establish a republican government in England, a movement into which he had thrown himself with a fervor that was more intellectual than religious, and, failing, he had come to France, where he was one of the leaders in a continuous conspiracy for the overthrow of the Stuarts and the monarchy, from which he had gained nothing but his own banishment.

In Paris he had been joined by Colonel Chillingworth, who had served with him in Ireland, had gone over to Cromwell, and had been compelled to fly for his life when Charles, coming back to London as the King, had begun to inflict upon his former enemies those open and covert punishments which were making him detested throughout the free-thinking world, and driving the followers of the Protector to despair and poverty.

Colonel Chillingworth's own estates in Devon had been declared forfeited, and had been bestowed upon Don Luis de Espinosa, a Spanish nobleman, who had been one of the royal refugee's suite in Flanders, and, his wife having early left him a widower, with an only child, he had joined in Paris the colony of the revolutionists who waited there for the storm at home to blow over, or else plotted for the overthrow of the crown. At the French capital he had resumed his friendship with Sidney, which had been interrupted when Algernon had decided not to throw in his lot with Oliver Cromwell, and once again they became inseparable companions, as they waited and watched the course of events in England.

Early in the year King Charles had announced to Parliament his negotiation of a triple alliance between England, Holland and Sweden, which caused great rejoicing in England. Secret agents at Versailles, however, had just given to Colonel Chillingworth and General Sidney positive information that Charles was even then negotiating a clandestine treaty with Louis, which would make England the catspaw of France, and that the dissolute monarch was leading his life of debauchery in London on money secretly supplied to him by the French king.

It was to carry tidings of this treachery to Colonel Chillingworth's kinsman, Captain Hazzard Mountford, then living quietly in London, that Nancy had been chosen, for that they were so surrounded by spies they durst not trust to any messenger, save one in whom they could repose the completest faith, so grave a secret, and one so full of peril to so many of their friends.

The three had left Paris quietly a week before, and had come to Lille, which was as far as the two men had thought it prudent for them to accompany the girl. The final stages of the journey, to Calais, and from thence across the Channel to England, she must make alone.

Mistress Nancy had entered into the scheme with enthusiasm. She had long sensed, rather than really known, that her stern soldier-father had always cherished in his heart a deep regret that his only child had not been a boy, and now that an opportunity offered, she was willing and eager to prove that a girl could serve her country and her cause as boldly and sagaciously as a boy.

A Devon girl, reared in the very hotbed of Puritanism, at a time when all England was torn by civil wars, could not very well escape those influences which make for ruggedness of character, and Nancy Chillingworth was a Devonshire girl to the tips of her fingers. She had spent much of her childhood in Plymouth, while her father was at the wars in Scotland, with her maiden aunt, Mistress Faith Cruller, who proved so inadequate to the task of rearing a high-spirited girl that Nancy grew up as little spoiled by the gloom of Puritanism as any girl in England. She spent her time in the shipyards, in a nest of chips and shavings, watching the men lay down the keel of some vessel, or fashioning with plank and spar a great ship, that she was later to see drop down the Catwater, and so sail away to the distant seas.

On the docks, when barks dropped anchor, battered by storm, or showing the scars of the fights they had been in, she would listen with shining eyes to the stories the mariners told of their adventures. She loved to go into the deep-bellied merchantmen, or the men-of-war, lying in the harbor, until she came to be as much at home on shipboard as in her aunt's front yard.

Sometimes she would spend hours sprawled upon the deck, absorbed in "Master Tapp's Sea-man's Kalender," for books, in her home, were scarce; and her eager mind drank up all the knowledge of the sea thus spread before her—how ships are built and rigged and victualed and sailed, so that she might have got a berth on any vessel out of Devon had she not been a girl.

Boys were her companions, and she entered into all their sports and games, and by the time she was fifteen could sail a boat with any of them. As these sturdy lads grew up and went off, one by one, in some splendid ship, with their bundles on their backs, they would leave her weeping on the quay, straining her eyes after their dimming sails, and raging at the fate that kept her from going, too. And so, when her father had come for her one night, hard pressed, with Royalist soldiers close at his heels, and searching the town for him high and low, Nancy had gloried in the suit of boy's clothes in which she had been smuggled aboard a lugger, and carried off safely to France.

So now, when the riding-cloak had been adjusted to her satisfaction, and her hat tilted at just the proper angle, she stamped her heel upon the hearth with all the sense of joyous freedom that being a boy again meant to her.

"I am ready," she announced, and held out her hand to General Sidney, who kissed it gallantly, as if he had been a Royalist, and then, laughing, gave it a mighty squeeze that made her wince.

"How now, Monsieur!" he laughed, with a twinkle in his eye. "Thou must have a man's hand-clasp."

She answered him with a roguish wink, and then, shadows chasing the smile from her eyes, threw herself into her father's arms.

"And now, my child," said he, "the hour of parting has come. Thou must go to Cousin Mountford, and say to him——"

"Upon my soul, Chillingworth," interrupted Sidney, "more instructions! By my word, thou art an old grandmother. I warrant the maid will carry the message without dropping an 'h,' and that she will be safely at Mountford's house before you can say 'Jack Robinson.'"

"Of course I will," replied Nancy.

"The Calais coach leaves within the half-hour—so be off with you, sir, and accept our apologies for not accompanying you thither, which might frustrate all our plans at last. Now, out the back entry with you, Monsieur Luronne, and we will watch the coach from the window, and do you hang out the signal—your hat—that we may safely count upon your departure having been made."

Nancy smiled at the nickname which had been bestowed upon her. She clasped General Sidney's hand, threw herself into her father's arms, kissed him—and the door had swung to softly behind her, and the two men were standing there alone in the little room, looking at each other searchingly in the gathering dusk, and straining their ears for the sound of her footsteps on the stairs.

CHAPTER II

YELLOW EYES

IT WAS with a brave show of more courage than she really felt that Monsieur Luronne left her father and General Sidney and set forth upon her mission. Now, as she stood in the narrow street in the gathering gloom, she was half-minded to fly back up the stairs; but the importance of the task that lay before her, and the thought that the Calais coach must be even then standing at the Golden Rabbit, with its six horses slobbering at their bits, and the postilions taking their farewell drinks at the tap-room, and that it would soon be off into the night, leaving her behind if she did not bestir herself, spurred her into action.

With a quick glance up and down the dim street, streaked here and there with little paths of light that streamed through shop windows and half-opened doors, she drew her cloak about her, and fell in behind a couple of soldiers who passed that way, laughing and jesting.

The Golden Rabbit was at the end of the street, only a short distance from the rooms over a pastry-cook's shop, which her father had taken when they arrived at Lille; and Nancy quickly found herself in the brick-paved courtyard, mingling with the throng of soldiers, stable-boys, travelers setting out upon a journey, or else returning from one, and a horde of vagabonds and beggars, and street-hawkers screaming their wares, and arguing vociferously with prospective customers. Under an archway at the corner the marketmen from the countryside were already gathering their carts, from which peeped baskets of greens, and sides of bacon, and plump fowls, and appetizing rolls of butter, wrapped in the green leaves of the vine, and sleepy-eyed children, all in a happy jumble.

Rough, shaggy ponies and uncombed little donkeys, unharnessed for the night, lay between their shafts, or contentedly nibbled their turnip-tops, spread for them upon the flagstones. Pigs squealed, hens cackled, ducks and geese squawked, and bereaved cows called plaintively for their calves, for which a lively bargaining was already in progress.

Torches gleamed in the murky evening air, and cast dancing shadows upon the crowds of farmers and drovers, making ready for the market-day upon the morrow, so that Mistress Nancy, seeing what sort of company she was in, and realizing that so far nobody had recognized her, or given her so much as a second look, felt her spirits rise; and so, shaking off a momentary fear of recognition, was thus all the more protected against it, and when she sought the fat, paunchy landlord of the inn to inquire about the seat in the coach that had been bespoken for her, she swaggered like some duchess's page, or the valet of a fine gentleman out for a lark.

But reaching the landlord, she quickly found, was to be no easy matter. In tight-fitting green breeches, and a brown smock that reached to his knees, both plentifully sprinkled with grease by reason of his frequent trips to the kitchen to turn a goose or a saddle of mutton upon the spit, this personage, who reflected his importance in every crease of his shiny face, that looked as if it had been freshly larded, held in his hand a small bit of board upon which he kept a record of the passages engaged, written in a sprawling hand with a chunk of red chalk, so that betwixt the clumsiness of his fingers and the awkwardness of his materials, he was frequently at as great a loss to read what he had written as he had been at first to write it; the more so since he was being well-nigh jostled off his feet by a crowd of drovers, teamsters, wool-buyers, soldiers, torn and ragged, and limping from their wounds, and tipsy seamen, on their way back to the fleet from a spree, and most of them, in consequence of the good times they had had, without the price of the fare, and all the more clamorous, and noisy, and profane, for that reason.

Nancy waited impatiently at first for a chance to claim her seat in the coach for the north, and then, observing that she could not hope to accomplish her purpose by such modest tactics, she placed herself behind a rotund little French monk, who was worming his way toward the landlord, butting those about him with his head, clawing and scratching at others who stood in his way, or shoving them aside with a pair of enormous shoulders which made him seem almost as broad as he was long; and soon she had the satisfaction of perceiving that she was slowly but surely approaching the center of the landlord's magic circle.

She was just congratulating herself on her shrewdness when a gigantic Norman pikeman hurled her aside, that he might take her place in the wake of the energetic little friar, so that she reeled backward and would have gone sprawling if a strong hand had not grasped her by the cravat and whirled her, spinning, back upon her feet.

"*Merci, Monsieur,*" she gasped, and looked into a pair of merry blue eyes that twinkled in the face of a red-haired lad whose countenance proclaimed his nationality as unmistakably as if a map of Donegal had been printed upon it.

It was so full of freckles that it would have been difficult to say whether there were a million of them, or just one large one. His nose turned up at such an angle that one would have wagered he found it necessary to stand upon his head to blow it; but it was his mouth that made Nancy feel that she had known him all her life; such a laughing, whimsical mouth it was, with red lips parted to show two rows of glistening teeth, and a carmine rag of a tongue that curled out of the corners on the slightest provocation.

"Faith, Monsieur!" he said with the rich brogue of a North-of-Irelander, "you could better dance a minuet than the step you need to fight your way in there. Are you by the Brussels coach?"

"For Calais," answered Mistress Nancy in English, and pulling her hat down further over her eyes. "My seat has been engaged these two days gone, but I wish to see that no mistake has been made, and claim my place."

"English you are? Faith, and I took you for a Pollyvooer, I did. Heed a word of wisdom, sir, and claim your seat yourself, while the pickin's good. It's filling up inside, and you'll have to be quick to get a place. And get inside—it'll be airish toward the coast tonight, I'm thinking."

"Are you by the Calais coach?" she asked him, hesitating.

"If I can work my way, I am. They usually need a hand with the horses at the last minute, and it's my meat this night if I have to commit a murther to get it."

"Should I get in at once then?" demanded the girl, moving toward the coach, and then stopping, in doubt.

"Sure, and I would," and with this he pulled open the door of the coach and gave her a "leg up," hurling her bodily within, just in the nick of time to rob a portly sheep-dealer, who otherwise would have secured the last of the coveted places, but who proved no match for Nancy's enforced agility.

Wedged in between the little monk, whose energy had rewarded him, and who snored already, like a trooper, on the one side, and a wheezy tradesman on the other, who coughed, and choked, and spluttered and blew until he shook the whole coach, Nancy settled herself as comfortably as possible, and tried to turn a deaf ear to the sheep-dealer, who complained bitterly of the effect the night air on the top of the coach would have upon his rheumatism. She was almost ready, to be rid of him, to surrender him her seat, when he discovered that it was the Brussels coach that he wanted, and went plunging away into the crowd, cursing and groaning.

IT WAS long past the hour of departure already, but not until both of Nancy's feet had gone to sleep, and she felt as if a million needles were pricking holes in them, and her spine seemed to have been driven clear through the hard wooden seat, from which most of the stuffing and leather had been rubbed and scraped by a generation of restless travelers, did the coach finally get away, heaving and lurching over the cobble-stones.

As it rumbled through the dim street, past the pastry-cook's, under whose dark eaves she knew two anxious men watched for her signal, she contrived, by leaning over the fat paunch of the snoring monk, to hang her hat from the window, waving it as long as she thought they were in sight. But whether her father and General Sidney were able to see it in the darkness of the poorly lighted street she had no way of discovering, and was compelled to trust to their eagerness to sharpen their eyes.

Soon they were through the city gates, the fortifications were left behind, and the horses strained in their harnesses over the muddy ruts of the road which stretched away head of them through the gloom.

The excitement and the novelty of her strange position kept her awake for a time, but even these wore off, and before long she fell into a sleep which not even the snores and wheezes of her two neighbors could disturb.

She did not awaken until near midnight. The coach had stopped at a roadside inn, a wretched place on the edge of a thick woods. Peering out, and observing that the postilions were changing horses, Nancy, bent upon stretching her cramped legs, climbed softly over the monk, who was still gurgling and snoring, his head upon his breast, as if each discordant gasp would be his last.

She found herself in a small, bare stable-yard, lighted only by the smoking torches of the hostlers, kicking and bullying the fresh horses into their places.

The tired moon had wrapped herself for the night in a coverlet of clouds and only a lone star shone low down on the horizon. The whole world seemed soggy and clammy, like a moist pudding laid away in a damp cloth.

Seeing that the stable-boys, what with the darkness and the restlessness of the horses, and the cold, which made all their fingers thumbs, were likely to be some time about their task, Nancy turned to the inn and, observing the gleam of a candle through the window, went in and stood before the fire which smoked and smoldered on the hearth and threatened at any minute to give up the unequal and discouraging fight against wet wood.

Looking about, she found herself in a low room, and, when her eyes had grown used to the shadows which engulfed it, she made out in the center of the floor a heavy hewn table, on which were the remains of a repast, which a frowsy scullion-boy was clearing away, and which she thought likely had been served to three rough, unkempt men, mud-covered from beard to brogans, who had drawn their bench into a recess at a casement window opening upon the stable-yard, where they sat, heads together, talking in whispers.

There was no particular reason why Nancy should have supposed that they were talking about her, save that they did, truly enough, steal a glance at her from time to time. But the conviction that they were discussing her, and very earnestly, too, came upon her with a little sense of apprehension, of what she knew not. Only she was glad when the door opened and the red-headed Irish lad, whom she had seen in the market-square at Lille, came into the room, and beckoned to her with a motion as if to say that the coach was ready to resume its journey.

She had a better opportunity to observe him then, as he stood beneath one of the torches thrust into a hole in the wall by the door, a clean-cut, good-looking lad, despite his ragged clothes and freckles, and the general air of indifference to fate and fortune which sat upon him; nor did she fail to note, even in that brief second, as she started for the door, that he, too, had suddenly become an object of the scrutiny of the three men in the corner by the casement.

She knew that the country they were in was overrun with soldiers of fortune, temporarily out of employment because of the cessation of the wars the king had waged in the Low Countries and turned adrift to shift for themselves, like hungry wolves let loose in a sheepfold.

One of the men, a great high-shouldered fellow, in the dress of a soldier of Flanders, though he looked more the Spaniard, quit his companions, and, leaving the room by a small door at the back, which opened long enough to show the corner of a smoke-grimed kitchen beyond, with a pot steaming on the grate, came back again on the instant, with the landlord at his heels. The landlord nodded at something the fellow said to him—all this in a twinkling—and when Nancy turned to join the Irish lad, one of the others crossed the room at a bound and shut her off from the door. And then, as there came to her from the frosty courtyard the crack of the postilion's whip, and the crunch of wheels, and she realized that the coach had gone, she saw him leap toward her, with a billet of wood in his hand, saw the freckle-faced boy spring at his neck from behind and go down with a blow on his head, saw the landlord bar the door and pull the torches from the wall, saw the other two men, as the light faded out, hurl themselves upon her, and then—nothing.

HOW long a time had passed before she put forth her hand in the darkness she did not know. But she did know, vaguely, that the effort cost her pain, and she seemed to float off again on a sea of unconsciousness.

Again, after a long, long while, she stretched forth her hand and this time she clutched something—a handful of straw. The discovery surprised her. She pondered upon it, minutes — hours — weeks — time meant nothing. She tried again. More straw.

She was on her back, lying upon a bed of straw and rushes. It was certainly not the coach.

In a cart, then, for it was moving, and roughly, too. If it were not for the pain in her head, she thought, she could tell whether it was a cart or not. Yes, it was certainly a cart. There was no room in the coach for one to lie prone upon the floor.

Then where was the coach? Where was the landlord of the inn—and where were the three men in the corner by the casement—and the red-headed Irish boy? A groan at her side answered this question. He was there beside her, in the straw.

Moreover, his wrist was tied to hers with a knotted rope. This discovery prompted her to still another: their feet were lashed together. No matter! It was only the pain in the head that counted, after all.

As for the Irish lad, he no doubt was dead. Had she not seen him struck down? No; he had groaned. Well, he had groaned, and then died. Yes; she had seen him struck down by a blow on his head. And then they had come upon her, in a rush across the room, and had taken her off her guard. Her mission was a failure at the start. She had been spied upon, followed, half killed, and carted away like a sack of meal. And back in Lille two men waited anxiously for her to deliver the tidings they were sending to England. Too bad! Too bad, indeed, for they had put such faith in her!

She opened her mouth, and the scream that poured forth in an angry, inarticulate wail of rage brought the front flap of the cart open with a jerk, and she saw framed in the opening, against a cold gray sky-line, the thick-lipped face of a man, with toothless gums, and a pair of yellow eyes, eyes the color of burnished gold, that looked as if they would scorch and burn and wither; eyes that blazed up and then grew dull, that flashed again, and sparkled like fire; eyes that seared her, that bored into the very soul of her, that she knew she would never forget again as long as she might live, and that she never did forget.

Not a word did he speak. Not a sound came from between those thick, purpled lips. But his eyes were eloquent. She looked into them, and obeyed their silent command.

The flap of thick cloth that covered the cart dropped back into place. She was in darkness, with only the image of that pasty head, hairless, with not a bristle upon it from nape to chin, bald as a turnip, and colorless but for the purple, swollen lips, and a great patch of red that showed when the lips were opened, to haunt her memory. And so she dropped off into nothingness again.

When next Nancy raised herself to look about her it was broad day. The man with the yellow eyes was leaning into the cart, hacking with a knife at the ropes that bound her to her comrade. He turned those two twin coals upon her, and, answering their mute question, she nodded her head, and crawled weakly to her feet, and with his assistance gained the ground.

She was weak, and grasped the wheel of the cart to steady herself. She saw by the sun that it must be on toward evening. At her side a tangled thicket, stunted trees, bent by the wind, dark, wild, and forbidding as any spot she had ever seen; in front of her a rocky beach, along which the calm sea lapped and gurgled like a child at play. Close in, a small boat, with two men at the oars, and, in the distance, half a mile offshore, a brigantine, on which the sails were breaking out; and she could see the seamen in her shrouds, and hear the ropes slipping in the falls.

The man with the yellow eyes emerged from the cart with the Irish lad, his head dangling between his shoulders, the face covered with clotted blood. He put the boy down, picked her up, and strode down to the beach, where he waded out to his hips in the water and threw her in the bottom of the boat.

"Lie still and hold your tongue," growled one of the men at the oars.

Yellow Eyes scrambled back over the rocks, and came down again with the Irish lad over his shoulders. He dropped the boy into the boat beside Nancy and, looking meaningly at the seaman at the bow oars, held out his hand. The sailor shook his head and pointed toward the ship.

Yellow Eyes nodded at this, and shoving off into deep water, wading out to his middle, swung himself into the stern sheets. The sailors fell to their oars.

Presently, Nancy, on her back in the bottom of the boat, saw the shadow of the ship fall across them. She was jerked to her feet and thrust up the ladder in the waist, followed by the two sailors, with the Irish lad between them, and Yellow Eyes, who vanished into the big cabin. The boat was swung up at the bits, the yards were squared away, and, the sails filling, the brigantine dropped down the bay on the ebbing tide, her nose turned to the open sea.

The ship had scarce got a bone in her teeth in the freshening breeze when there was a commotion behind her, and Nancy, who had sunk down in the scuppers, turned to see the man with the yellow eyes throw off two seamen who were clinging to him, and rush to the rail with a look on his face so full of astonishment that it would have been ludicrous but for the rage and hate in the eyes that burned like blazing fagots, the purple lips, now almost black and twisted with passion, and the empty red gullet which the girl observed now plainly for the first time, with a shudder, for the tongue had been cut out.

She turned her head to shut out the wretched sight, and her glances swept the roughening waters of the little cove as it broadened into the channel and over which the whitecaps danced with crests that rose and fell, and broke into glistening sprays of foam. She saw the dimming shore-line, the rocks and scrub oaks, and against their background the cart, with the shaggy horse standing there patiently, as if waiting for its master to come back.

CHAPTER III

THE SHIP OF BRIDES

A MOAN at her side made Nancy turn, and then she sank on one knee to the deck beside the Irish lad, who, lying still where he had been thrown, now opened his eyes. A wave of tenderness swept over her.

"Forgive me," she said, and gently smoothed back the matted hair, disclosing a long, jagged cut, that laid open the scalp to the skull.

No one paid the slightest attention to them as she looked about her for a friendly face.

The ship was in the utmost confusion. The waist, as far as the forecastle, was a litter of bales, and chests of goods, and a great number of casks in a heap, which a dozen tatterdemalions, haggard of face, and wretched-looking beyond belief, were passing below and stowing away in the hold under the direction of the cape-merchant, or purser. Abaft the mainmast, at the capstan, stood Yellow Eyes, head sunk between his shoulders, in an attitude of utter dejection.

The deck swarmed with men, and women, too; some in rags, others in finery that looked oddly out of place amid such surroundings. They lounged along the gunwales, gazing off toward the shore, now a dim line of haze astern, or else sprawled full length, or sat where they could find a place, on chest or crate, as if worn out and exhausted.

One among them she recognized with a start, the little monk who had been her traveling companion in the Calais coach. He was seated on a box, contentedly gnawing the nub of a ham-bone, and sucking out the marrow with every evidence of satisfaction. At the rail near her a young French girl was leaning dejectedly. Nancy beckoned to her.

"Can you not find a basin of water and a cloth for me?" she asked, with a gesture toward the wounded boy on the deck.

The girl shrugged her shoulders as if in refusal and then, thinking the better of it, went off without a word. She emerged presently from the cook-room in the forecastle with a bowl of steaming water and a bit of a rag.

Mistress Chillingworth took them eagerly, smiling her thanks, and began bathing the head of the Irish lad. The girl, watching these proceedings in silence, went off again, and, coming back with a tankard of water, raised the boy's head in the hollow of her arm and poured a few drops down his throat.

"He will come around all right," she said, looking at Nancy curiously. "Your brother?"

Nancy shook her head.

"A friend," she answered.

"'Tis an ugly wound."

"For my sake, too. A brave lad. Come, rouse up, sir." This to the Irish boy. "Let us get you once upon your feet, and I feel sure you will be better speedily."

Thus encouraged, the boy climbed to the rail and stood there, swaying about. The two girls held him up, and, the salt of the sea getting into his head, braced him wonderfully. Now they observed crew and passengers gulping down soup, which was being passed out to them in bowls, and eating great chunks of bread.

Nancy, joining the rush to the cook-room, returned with food which all three fell upon greedily, their backs to the bulwarks, the bowls of soup in their laps, the bread serving them for spoons. The meal put strength and courage into them.

Even the French girl showed in her eyes that she had plucked up heart. Of an unmistakable type, she was pretty, chic, bedecked in cheap finery, with a pale face, deep circles beneath her eyes, cheeks rouged, a girl who had crowded thirty years into her twenty years of life, and showed every one of them. Nancy, with that quick and true intuition which young girls sometimes feel, knew her for what she was, for she had lived too long in Paris not to have seen many like her.

"What may your name be, my friend?" she asked.

The French girl shrugged her shoulders and smiled, a wan, ghostly smile. Tears stood in her eyes.

"My name? What matters that. They calle me 'Cherie.' Let that do for you. And yours, Monsieur?"

Nancy blushed.

"My name? Oh, Monsieur Luronne."

The French girl looked at her keenly, as if she would speak. Then she shrugged her shoulders.

"And yours, Monsieur?" This to the Irish lad. "Since fate has thrown us together we may as well be friends.

"Barney McGiggen, Mademoiselle, at your service. At least, I will be at your service when I can rid myself of this pain in my head. Faith! What a blow that fellow gave me! I am stunned by it yet."

"What blow?" demanded Cherie, who looked inquiringly at Nancy. "I saw no one strike you. How came you by this frightful wound? And you, Monsieur—Luronne. There is blood upon your face, and in your hair. I fear you need assistance, too."

"'Tis nothing. I am all right now. We were beaten and brought on board, as you have seen. What ship I know not."

"The *Saint-Jean Baptiste*," she said. "We sailed from Calais under charter of the French West India Company for Tortuga, with a mixed cargo, and fifty women to be the wives of the colonists there."

"Tortuga!" cried Nancy. "The name is new to me. I know not where that city is."

"I do not know rightly myself, Monsieur, only that it is in the Western Indies, and it is not a city at all but an island, as near as I can make it out."

"The Spanish Indies! Then are we not bound for England?"

"Ah, no, Monsieur. Were you for England?"

"Faith! And it'll be a long day before we see England again, I'm thinking," said Barney, a broad grin stretching his lips almost from ear to ear. "I saw by the looks of her she's a ship for foreign parts, and sure, it suits me well enough. I'd as soon go to the New World as anywhere else, and a bit sooner. There's gold there, to be picked up in the streams. Faith, Monsieur, we'll all be rich."

Nancy had sprung to her feet, and tears which she could not keep back flooded her eyes, and rolled down her cheeks. But tears had been too common a sight upon that ship that day to cause any comment. Cherie buried her face in her arm upon the rail, and wept, and Barney's blue eyes began to blink rapidly. He choked back any pangs of homesickness he might have felt with a merry whistle, and slapped Nancy upon the shoulder.

"Have done with tears, Monsieur," he laughed. "Save them for another time. Sure, and I guess we'll need them soon enough at best."

Nancy dried her eyes. She did not care for herself, for the love of adventure ran warm and red in her veins. But the picture her imagination drew of the two men in a shabby lodging in Lille, waiting for her to come back from a mission from which she would not return, and of the long days of anxiety and grief her father would feel until she could contrive to get to him some word of her plight, was more than she could bear with unconcern.

"'Tis a long journey these women are taking to marry their men in the New World," she said after a while. "But women have ever dared all dangers for the sake of the men they love."

Cherie smiled, but a smile in which there was no mirth.

"Love and romance, I fear, have no place in the hearts of such as we. We are going out to marry men whom we have never seen. For myself, I shall take the first who offers. Yes, the first man who speaks me when I land, him will I have for husband."

"I do not understand." Nancy's eyes were wide now. "I thought women, and men, too, married but for love. I would wed for love, and love alone."

"The world has been good to you, Monsieur, but with us—it is not so. It is a world of misery and sorrow, of wretchedness and unhappiness." She pointed to a group of bedraggled women leaning listlessly over the rail at the stern, as if straining their tired eyes to catch one last glimpse of the land they were leaving. "Human beings, though, like the rest of us," she added significantly. "God have mercy on their souls—and on mine. Derelicts all, Monsieur."

"Who are they?" asked Barney.

"Who knows?" answered Cherie, with another shrug of her shapely shoulders. "Pickpockets, thieves, murderers—worse. The scum of the alleys of Paris. Fine ladies of quality! I warrant you there are no greater rogues in all Europe, nor any in Christendom more steeped in misery and despair."

"And so they are going out to—what is the name of the place?"

"Tortuga, in the Spanish Indies. I know nothing of it save what I have learned from one of the mariners who is lately from that place. A small island off the coast of Hispaniola, or Domingo, as some call it now. A rendezvous, it is, for all the riffraff of those seas, but a pleasant enough island, and very fertile, so that the French West India Company has a mind to hold it permanently for France.

"But there are no women there, this seaman tells me, and Monsieur, the Governor, thinking to make his fierce sea-rovers settle down contentedly as colonists, hit upon the idea of fetching out a shipload of women to be their wives. Well, I am one of the sheep bought in the market-place and now being delivered."

"Do none go willingly?"

"Ay, some among us do—those who would save their necks, or their carcasses from rotting in the hulks."

"And the men among you?"

"The same—save that they are men. They will be sold when we reach Tortuga. Well, I hope to get an honest master—and you, too. If I don't—I would kill the man who put the lash to my back!"

"Sold!" cried Nancy.

"*Oui*, the women for wives, the men for servants. You will be knocked down to the highest bidder, for six, eight, mayhap twelve, years. That is why you were kidnaped. But didn't they turn the tables on that evil-visaged scoundrel who brought you aboard! The whole ship is laughing at the way they served him."

"Yellow Eyes, you mean."

"True, his eyes are yellow, the evilest ever I saw, too. It makes my flesh creep to see him. And what a rage he is in. He came aboard to get his pay for kidnaping you two boys, and the quota of indentured servants we are taking out not being full, Captain Jean calmly carries him off, too.

Many's the poor devil he has sent to die in the plantations. Now he knows what it is to be paid in the same coin."

The ship was now well out of sight of land, and night coming on. They made their way into the forecastle to choose their bunks, and a poor choice it was, seeing that all the best places had been taken by those more prudent than themselves. A stuffy, stinking hole it was, lighted by a smoking lamp or two, overrun with vermin, crowded and packed with a noisy, blasphemous throng of men, herded together like cattle. Into this fetid cavern Nancy and Barney crept. The girl found an empty bunk too small and undesirable for anybody else to have claimed it, and curling up in it, laid down, and soon was fast asleep, with the cursing and laughing crowd of derelicts gambling and drinking all about her, and the lapping of the sea against the side of the ship in her ears.

How long a time she had slept she did not know. A low whining sound, as if of a child in pain, aroused her, and raising herself on her elbow and looking about she made out on the cabin floor the figure of a man lying upon his back, with a half-grown mastiff puppy licking his face.

The forecastle was shrouded in darkness. A few faint flickers yet remained in one of the tallow lamps. The merrymakers who had been gathered about the rough table, playing at ombre, or lanterloo, and drinking and feasting, had vanished. The whole place was choked with the sound as of many men hard asleep. Their snores and moans and throat-rattlings floated out from every bunk, and blended in a chorus in which each man seemed to be trying to outdo his neighbor. The one upon the floor was not disturbed.

She leaned from her bunk, the better to observe him and this dog that pawed at his breast, whining and uttering yelps of distress. As she did so, the little patch of light that showed at the hatchway darkened, and a man came down. She drew back and lay still. It was Yellow Eyes.

He crept softly to the man upon the floor and turned him partly over, and Nancy saw then what she had not observed before, the shaft of a knife in the fellow's neck under the ear. Yellow Eyes drew it out and wiped the blade upon the dead man's shirt. Then, kicking the puppy out of his way, lifted him upon his back, and, with a quick look around him, staggered up the companionway with his burden.

Nancy strained her ears then for the sound she knew would follow, but she could not be sure that she heard the splash as the body went overboard, as she knew it did go, as well as if she had seen it, out there on deck, with the fog settled down all around the ship, engulfing it in a ghostly mist. She lay still, scarcely daring to breathe, for she knew, too, what Yellow Eyes would do next. And presently he came back with something in his hand that looked like a coat, and kicking again at the dog that was smelling at something upon the floor, dropped to his knees and began swabbing at the great red stain that Nancy knew was there.

Then he disappeared up the hatchway again, leaving the puppy whimpering in the middle of the forecastle floor.

He was back again, more quickly this time, on his toes, starting at every creak and groan of the straining timbers, listening intently, turning his head first this way and then that. Once Nancy saw his yellow eyes, glowing in the darkness like coals, full upon her. She closed her own. She scarcely breathed. Her heart stopped beating in her breast, and a roaring filled her ears.

But he passed her bunk and went forward softly, and by and by she heard the sound of his heavy body settle down in a bunk some distance from where she lay.

The orchestra of slumbering men continued its discordant music, and presently she heard a new note join in the refrain, and knew that Yellow Eyes had gone happily to sleep, with the dead man's wallet in his vest, and peace in his soul. In all that company she and the puppy alone were ill at ease. The dog's whines filled her with pity.

Impulsively she climbed down softly past the sleeping men in the bunks beneath her, gathered the puppy in her arms, and, climbing back with him, the two laid down together, and so, at last, dropped off to sleep, and slept till morning.

CHAPTER IV

THREE-LEGS

FAIR winds and smooth seas marked each succeeding day for three weeks. Captain Jean, the grizzled Breton master of the *Saint-Jean Baptiste*, steered their course for the Canaries, and, after stopping there for two days for wood and water, during which time no shore liberty was allowed, and a strict watch was kept night and day on all the wretched passengers, dropped down to the Cape Verdes. Here they altered their course to the westward, and went across on the northeast trades.

By this time Nancy and Barney had made themselves favorites with the passengers and crew. The only youngsters on board, they were soon fetching and carrying for the whole ship. They feasted on titbits from the master's cabin and stood their watches with the men as if they had used the sea all their lives.

Naturally of a cheerful disposition, the girl accepted the new state of her fortunes with Puritanical stoicism. She had satisfied herself that she had been kidnaped, not because her father's secret had been discovered, but because she was worth, delivered on board ship, a Spanish pistole to Yellow Eyes.

Him she avoided, keeping out of his way at all times, as well for her own sake as for the dog's, for Yellow Eyes had taken a violent dislike to the puppy, as if it reminded him of a thing he would forget. She often felt his molten eyes burning into her, compelling her to look at him by some strange power that they held.

She would turn her face as quickly as she could, to shut out the sight of him, with his almost fleshless skull, his thick purple lips, in which all the blood in his body seemed to have settled, and his toothless gums and tongueless gullet beyond.

She and Barney spent most of their time with the helmsman, Pierre, the wrinkled-faced, who had been twice around Africa by the Portuguese route to India, and was commonly reputed to have obtained his uncanny skill in reckoning the position of the ship by sun or stars from the devil himself, with whom he was generally believed to be on terms of closest intimacy. A bushy beard encircled his face, so that he seemed to be peering out upon a world of dangers from behind a friendly ambuscade, a surmise confirmed by a pair of singularly alert and sharp little eyes which snapped and twinkled incessantly.

In the steerage room of the ship before the great cabin, he stood at the compass and kept a record upon the travas of the number of half-hour-glasses they steered upon every point. From him they learned the lore of the deep sea, of storm and calm, and Nancy, as she had done in her childhood on the docks at Plymouth, drank in the tales he told with shining eyes and parted lips.

All that she had studied in Master Tapps' and the books on navigation she had read in her young girlhood came back to her now, and Pierre, explaining to her the intricate points, so that she could put what she had learned into practise, she soon became a very fair navigator and could observe the latitude and longitude, and "prick the card" and "say the compass" with the best.

AND so, what with winds that failed, or blew from the wrong quarter, the weeks slipped by until on the sixty-second day after they had quit the shores of France, when water-casks were nearly empty, and crew and passengers were on short allowance of half a pound of biscuits and a gill of brandy a day, they sighted land. This proved to be the easternmost cape of Hispaniola. So, standing off to avoid a Spanish ship of war that gave chase, they bore away to the northwest.

"Hark ye, Barney," said Nancy, drawing the Irish lad into a quiet corner. "I've been working out a scheme and want your advice upon it. Ever since we left France I have been busy with plans to get back, but ever a difficulty offered to my designs. Now, I have in my shoes some gold pieces, and with them, I warrant you, we shall be able to pay our passage back like gentlemen. What think you of that for an idea?"

Barney's million freckles blended into one before his whole face seemed to disappear over the horizon of his distended mouth, which opened in a grin so vast he was like to lose himself in it entirely. His blue eyes blinked furiously. Then there came into them a subtle craftiness.

"Faith! I think 'tis the poorest ever I heard of. You will be robbed for your pains." The smile disappeared, and a look of deep concern spread over his countenance.

"Robbed!"

"Ay, that you will. I have seen more of the world than you have, Monsieur. There are a dozen men on this ship who would split your wizen for a piece of silver, let alone gold. Show your *louis d'or* to these beggars, and your money will not be all that you will lose. By the Saints! It makes me shiver to think of it, it does."

"But Captain Jean is an honest man. He has treated us kindly on the voyage."

"A lot of men are honest until you show them gold."

"'Tis true enough, Barney, and yet would I trust to Captain Jean, were it——"

She turned quickly, as the sound of a scuffle came to her ears, in time to see Yellow Eyes kick savagely at the mastiff. The man had evidently come up unawares close by to where they stood, but what he had heard of their conversation they could not tell.

The dog, yelping with pain, picked himself up from the deck, and rushed upon the tongueless man, ears back, white fangs gleaming wickedly in his half-grown jaws. Yellow Eyes raised his foot again, and Nancy, picking up a hand-spike, dealt him a blow in the face that made him measure his length on the deck.

He was on his feet in an instant, with a deep cut in his forehead, and his yellow eyes full of blood, and with a roar of rage hurled himself upon her. He drew his knife as he sprang, a wicked blade which was no new sight to her.

They say that as a person drowns, his whole life comes back in retrospect in that one last crowded instant. Nancy found time to regret that she had not denounced Yellow Eyes the first day out, that she had deemed it the part of prudence to keep a secret even from Barney, the things she had witnessed in the forecastle.

Because the man who had been missed had been deemed a worthless jailbird at best, who doubtless had cast himself into the sea in a fit of despondency, she had been content to remain silent, lest she could not prove the crime, and so would suffer herself in the end. And now, for her forbearance, she was to feel the same knife in her own throat.

She grasped the hand-spike with a firmer clutch, and met the blow as it descended, and parried it. Then she saw the lean body of the mastiff, a dun streak across her eyes, saw him leap for the corded neck of Yellow Eyes, saw the knife flash in a great circle, and saw the dog met in mid-air and fall backward, its right foreleg cut off at the shoulder.

As the dog fell, Barney, the Irish lad, leaped at Yellow Eyes. The freckles on his face were gone now, wiped out by the rush of blood to his skin, which was scarlet, as all the fighting instinct of his race was aroused. He hurled himself between Nancy and her assailant, but the boy was no match for the powerful arms and shoulders of the dumb man, who sent him reeling back into the gunwales, where he fell a crumpled heap in the scuppers, and then raised his knife, and sprang at the girl with the fury of a beast.

A great crowd came rushing to where they struggled, shouting "A fight! A fight!" and got about them in a ring to witness the sport.

Nancy grasped her hand-spike with a firmer grip. And then she saw something—the girl Cherie. A Cavalier, rather down at the heel, but unmistakably of a different stamp from the vagabonds and rascals who comprised the human cargo of the *Baptiste*, came running along the deck, not knowing just what was going on to cause so much excitement, and anxious to see. As he passed Cherie she pulled his sword from his belt, and squirming through the throng, stooped down, and sent it spinning along the deck to where Nancy stood.

She reached for it quickly—all this in the flash of an eyelid—and Yellow Eyes, although he little knew it, was face to face with a pupil of one of the best swordsmen in Cromwell's army. A smile came over Nancy's face. Her eyes danced, the rich warm blood of her suffused her face with a rosy glow of zest for her father's favorite sport. He had often told her that he had taught her to fence as well as his son might have done at her age.

The recollection of it gave her confidence, which Yellow Eyes perceiving, he hesitated, and in that moment of hesitation was lost. For she had the blade at his throat now, and the cheers of the crowd in her ears, and in her heart a recklessness she had never known before, that intoxicated her.

But fate, as if she had reserved him for another end, came to his rescue now. Pierre the navigator, Pierre the faithful, hearing the great din and learning what it was all about, for the first time left the helm without a hand upon it, an act that changed the whole current of Nancy Chillingworth's life and his own.

As he came plunging down the slanting deck, bellowing like a wild bull, and tossing out of his way those who impeded his progress, a great wave striking the ship on her quarter, she fell off her course, and the sea broke over her as she lay in the trough and deluged her with a flood of water from the forecastle aft to the binnacles, the shivering sails cracking like thunder, just as the mastiff, on three legs, its body covered with blood, leaped again for Yellow Eyes.

The wave struck them full, and man, girl, and dog went down in a heap together. Nancy's head hit the gunwale, so that she lay quite still with eyes closed, and that all thought she had been killed. Barney and Cherie were quickly at her side and bending over her.

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried out Cherie. "It is a woman!"

The great crowd was suddenly silent, as they picked her up and carried her into the cabin, Barney's face gone white as chalk, and Pierre's eyes blinking and snapping at a faster rate than they had ever blinked and snapped before.

As for Yellow Eyes, his salt-water bath had taken the fight out of him. He slunk forward, his yellow eyes like molten gold, his tongueless gullet distended, so that those who saw him turned their heads and shuddered, and some of them fondled the dog affectionately, and bound up its wounds.

CHAPTER V

BRAS-DE-MORT

TWO days later they dropped anchor in a little cove on the southern coast of Tortuga, their voyage at an end.

The night had been one of wretchedness and misery for Nancy, who had recovered consciousness to find herself among the women in the cabin, where a bunk next to Cherie's had been found for her. She needed no one to tell her, then, that the secret she had guarded had been discovered, and apprehensions on this score filled her with fear, the more so, since she asked in vain to see Barney.

"Captain Jean's orders," was all the explanation she could receive from Cherie, who fretted over her like a grandmother with a new baby. But although she was good to her, and nursed her tenderly, she dared not disobey, nor did any favorable opportunity offer for the boy to be smuggled in to her, a thing that she was most desirous of, in order that she might ask his advice, having always found him wise beyond his years.

As for herself, no cajolery nor subterfuge could induce her to disclose her identity. She kept her mouth as tight as wax.

"Forgive me, my dear," said Cherie, "for the exclamation which destroyed your incognito, but it sprang impulsively to my lips. And now, I fear, I have done you a grave injury—put you in greater danger than you were in before."

"I know you meant me no injury," replied Nancy, "for you have given me assurances of your friendship that I can not doubt. But for your quick wit in passing me the sword I should now be—overboard, I guess, by this time."

She shuddered, but smiled again.

"I dare say, though," she added, "that my misfortunes will be no more in one rôle than in another. And now that I am in my proper person once more, I shall know the better how to act for my protection. Perhaps as a woman I shall be better off than as a boy."

"That," answered Cherie, with a shrug of her shoulders, "depends a good deal, I should say, upon whether you prefer to work for a man as his slave or his wife. The wages, I imagine, are the same," she finished bitterly.

Nancy sat bolt upright at this.

"Wife!"

"Ay, they'll have us one way or another, you may be sure."

The girl said nothing more after this, but Captain Jean coming into the cabin presently, she drew him aside.

"May I not have your consent to go on deck, Monsieur?" she asked. "Or have the boy Barney come here to me, that I may speak with him, my friend, upon the situation in which I now find myself?"

"The consent is not mine to give, Mademoiselle," he answered. "Monsieur d'Ogeron has come aboard, and is in command. He has heard your story, and is most anxious to speak with you. It is to fetch you to him that I have come."

"Who is Monsieur d'Ogeron, that you, the Captain, should take orders from him?" demanded Nancy.

"He is the Governor and Major of the island, Mademoiselle, and since he is supreme here under the French West India Company, his word is final."

"Then I fear 'twill be but a waste of time to make of you a request that lies even nearer yet to my heart," the girl answered.

"I had hoped you might grant it me."

"Right willingly I would if it were within my power."

"Is it, then, not within your power to carry me back to France with you, and the boy Barney, too? We came not willingly, Monsieur."

"That I know and deeply regret. But such is the system, and I must bring as safely as I may the cargo that they deliver to me. They would not permit me to take you back. I fear another future awaits you here."

"Could you not smuggle me back then, if I should hide on board? You see, Monsieur, I lay bare to you the secret I have nurtured, and throw myself upon your honor."

"I will not betray you."

"If I should hide myself aboard, would you protect me, Monsieur?"

"I could not."

"Why?"

"I carry back with me, Mademoiselle, thirty Englishmen, as prisoners, evil fellows and trouble-makers, who have refused to submit to the government his Majesty has established here in Tortuga. They have sought to seize the island from France."

"Englishmen!" cried Nancy. "Why, Monsieur, I, too——"

She stopped. Captain Jean looked at her narrowly.

"Mademoiselle is English, too, *hein!*" She raised her hand, and placed her finger on her lips. "*Sacrê bleu!* I will not betray you."

"So you see, Captain Jean, I should be among friends."

"In irons, yes, Mademoiselle," he laughed.

"In irons!"

"*Mon dieu!* Yes, prisoners—irons. What is there so strange about that combination? We are from Tortuga for Toulon, and were you among the English prisoners you would be clapped into the bagnio with them and sent thence to the galleys. You would do better in the Indies, Mademoiselle."

He led the way on deck, she following dejectedly, and so she saw Tortuga, its wooded crest and palm-strewn sands bathed in a flood of tropical sunlight which made her, coming thus suddenly into the light, blink with a speed that would have done credit to Pierre himself.

Captain Jean pointed upward, where a fort and castle, with two guns, commanded the cove in which the *Baptiste* lay at anchor. Perched upon the side of a heavily timbered and rocky mountain, it seemed in danger of slipping off into the sea.

"In there," he said briefly, giving her a knowing wink.

"The Englishmen?"

"*Oui*, the English dogs! Pardon, Mademoiselle, I forget myself. The English women, they are beautiful, charming. The English men—cutthroats!"

And so they passed into the master's cabin, or roundhouse. A gentleman arose as they entered, and came toward them, and Nancy, feeling his eyes upon her, lowered her own, and for the first time upon that voyage, blushed.

"She is here, Monsieur," announced Captain Jean briefly, and then, something in the girl's drawn face and tired eyes giving him a boldness he had not assumed before, he added quickly, "She has been kidnaped, and comes not of her own will."

"Kidnaped!" D'Ogeron scowled and shrugged his shoulders. "'Tis what they all say." He turned to Nancy, and the girl shrank beneath the admiration in his eyes. "You came as a servant, Mademoiselle," he said. "You will remain as a wife."

"Truly, I came not at all of my own wish, but was kidnaped, as Captain Jean has informed you."

"Tush! 'Tis what they all say. Glad enough of a chance for a free voyage to the Indies, and begging off when once they land."

"I am not begging off." Her eyes flashed with a look that General Sidney might have recognized and loved. "I am an English woman, ay, and proud of it, and not afraid to proclaim it. I claim my rights as an English woman, Monsieur. My country and yours are not at war."

"Below the tropic they are, as you will find, Mademoiselle."

"Even so, since when have Frenchmen fought women, Monsieur?"

"You have me there," the Governor laughed. "Fight them? *Mon dieu!* No, no. We love them, my friend."

"Monsieur chooses to be insulting."

"Come, my pretty! A saucy jade, eh, Captain?" The honest sailor's face darkened at this, and he pulled his beard a savage jerk that was like to tear it from his chin. "And of the quality, too, or I am no judge of a woman's fine points. What is your name, Mademoiselle?"

Nancy looked at Captain Jean, but finding his eyes averted from hers, and seeing by his attitude that he had done for her all that he could, she realized that she must look now to herself alone for protection.

"I can not tell you that," she answered, "although I can assure you it is one not unknown in France as in England."

D'Ogeron, a handsome man a little under middle age, in Rhinegrave breeches seamed all over with scarlet and silver lace, sleeves whipped with ribbons and cannons of the same fluttering material at his knees, caressed his mustache at this. Then, stepping up to her, he sought to take her by the hand. She drew back quickly, her face flushing a crimson color, her blue eyes flashing. He laughed, a good-natured laugh, and tried to slip his arm about her waist, whereat she sprang across the cabin, and placed the table between herself and him, and so stood there, glaring, her nose quivering with resentment, until, as he sought to follow, she found the way clear to the companionway, and springing up, gained the deck, leaving Captain Jean with a grin on his face, and d'Ogeron wearing a flabby smile.

The nondescript crowd of passengers were crowded into the waist, lining the rail, gazing with eager eyes upon the island, and watching the crowd of ragged and tattered men who had flocked down to the beach, where they stood about in groups, repaying all their curious glances with interest; or busy packing up their few belongings.

Nancy, singling out Barney and Cherie, who stood together at the beak-head ladder in the bow, wormed her way through the mob and joined them, and was received with expressions of liveliest interest and delight. The first boat having been lowered, and having no possessions to impede them, they scrambled down, among the first to leave, and soon were pulling off for the shore, with Cherie perched in the bow.

As they came into shoal water, a man who stood apart from the others on the beach waded out, and seizing the boat, hauled her up. He offered his hand to the girl crouching on the bow like some carved figurehead, and Cherie, placing her own within it, was deftly swung ashore. Nancy and Barney following her, they looked about them upon as strange a crew of poor devils as might have been found in all Christendom.

Nearly all of the islanders were Frenchmen, with here and there a Portuguese, or a renegade Spaniard who had fled to the French colony to escape the penalty for his crimes among people of his own kind. Dirty, unwashed, unkempt, with matted hair falling to their shoulders, over faces baked red by the sun of the tropics, they were clad for the most part in short canvas or cotton breeches, ragged and torn, frayed at the knees, with coarse cotton shirts hanging over them. Filth, smoke, bloodstains, and grease had dyed them to the color of a rotten sail. Their hats, fashioned from the skins of goats or wild animals, were brimless, little more than rude caps. Many of them boasted no other covering than the thatch with which nature had endowed them.

Around their waists were belts of untanned hides, ornamented with so many knives and pistols, that one would have thought that slaughter was their sole occupation; nor would one have been mistaken, for it was.

From their shoulders hung leathern pouches filled with powder and shot, and nearly every one carried a musket. Those who were not barefooted as well as hatless wore rough brogans which had been fashioned by their own unskilful hands, from the skin of the wild pig.

A roaring tide of shouts and exclamations ebbed and flowed through them as, gesticulating and grimacing, they rushed out to meet the small boats from the ship which had begun to discharge their loads of human freight, enquiring as to the news from Europe; to learn, perchance, by vague and adroit questioning, so as not to disclose their own identities, if any among the new arrivals came from parts whence they themselves hailed, and knew aught of friends or relatives.

With the landing of every fresh boat, as the newcomers mingled with those on shore, the din and confusion increased. Many of the men had been in the Indies for ten or twenty years, and the women were like creatures from some other world. They stood around on shuffling feet and with gaping mouths, only the more daring among them offering to address these strange beings who had come among them to be their wives, and share their wretchedness.

He who had assisted Cherie to land, a young fellow of thirty in the dress of a gentleman, escorted her gallantly into the shade of a palm, which grew close to the water's edge, but at some distance from the point where the boats were landing.

"Mademoiselle," said he, taking off his hat, and making her a sweeping bow, "it honors me to offer you the protection of my hand, and my heart also," he added, with mock courtesy, and yet with a note of manliness in his voice which the girl, giving him a quick glance from her dark eyes, was not slow to recognize.

"Monsieur is an impetuous lover," she smiled, sarcasm, raillery, and pathos blended in her low tones. "He wears his heart upon his sleeve."

"You misjudge me, Mademoiselle. No sudden fancy drives me thus to a declaration of tenderness toward you. Long since, when first I learned of this project of the Governor's, I made up my mind to wed the first woman who stepped ashore, would she but have me. I, you see, am a fatalist. You were the first—and quite well satisfied I am, Mademoiselle, with the kindness of fate."

"*Merci!* You turn a compliment prettily. You offer me your heart and hand. I accept them," and Cherie held out her hand to him, and grew suddenly shy when he took it and pressed it to his lips.

"You flatter me, and raise me in my own estimation. I can not be so low a creature as I have sometimes thought myself to be, since you——"

"Monsieur flatters himself," she interrupted, laughing.

"Ah!"

"I, too, am a fatalist."

"I do not comprehend."

"I made an oath, when I turned my back upon all that lies behind me, that I would take for lord and master the first man who offered me that honor, were he the devil himself."

"You are frank, Mademoiselle."

"As you were."

"Quite true. We are well met. It is a bargain, then."

"I am ready when the priest is."

"I have no name to offer you, Mademoiselle."

"I understand. Nor I one to surrender. I did that long, long ago, when all the world was young. Thou art getting no vestal, Monsieur," she added faintly, turning her face, her eyes upon the ground, while the blood mounted to her cheeks.

"Thou can blush still, Mademoiselle, and so thou art not bad. I take thee without knowing, or caring to know, who thou art. If anybody from whence thou camest would have thee, thou wouldst not have come in quest of me. I do not desire thee to give me an account of thy past conduct, because I have no right to be offended at it at the time when thou wast at liberty to behave either well or ill, according to thy own pleasure. Give me only thy word for the future; I acquit thee of the past."

He raised from his shoulder the musket which he carried.

"This," he added, "will revenge me of thy breach of faith. If thou shouldst prove false, this will surely be true to my aim."

She bent her head in assent.

"And thou?"

"I will cherish thee and love thee and be kind to thee until the end," he replied with increasing intensity, so that she looked at him, full into the eyes, then turned her head aside.

When next he looked at her, her eyes were wet. He smiled at her and took her by the arm, as Nancy and Barney, who had been searching for them in the crowds, came up to where they stood. Cherie motioned to her companion.

"We are to be married," she said simply, throwing her arms around Nancy's neck and weeping. "Ah, Mademoiselle!"

"Mademoiselle!" exclaimed the man, looking at Nancy more closely. "*Mon dieu!* Pardon, Mademoiselle. I mistook you for a *petit garçon*. I assure you your disguise is perfect. Perfect! And—" with a significant glance at the rough crew frolicking on the beach—"if you will accept my advice, it is that you preserve your incognito."

"The advice is excellent," answered Nancy, "but unhappily it comes too late."

"Ah!"

"The discovery was made on shipboard. I fear it is too late now to pretend to be aught save what I truly am, a very forlorn and unhappy girl."

"*Sacré!* It is too bad. If that is so I greatly fear that before nightfall you will find yourself wed to one of these greasy cattle-hunters—and then, may God have mercy on your soul!"

Nancy looked afar off to where the waters of the sea blended blue with the azure of the tropic sky.

"No," she answered softly, "not while that cliff is yonder!"

"Faith! Don't say that," interrupted Barney. "Why, it's wicked. And besides, we're all here to look out for you."

"Thank you, Barney. I know I can depend upon you—but what can you do?"

"Oh, there'll be a way out of this. But I don't blame you for being down at the mouth. Why, if they tried to make me marry one of those men down there, I'd—I'd—I don't know what I'd do. I'd kill him!"

Nancy threw back her head and laughed, a merry, ringing laugh.

"Ah, Barney boy," she said, "with you for my defender, I should not fear."

"Mademoiselle leaves me out!" cried the Frenchman in an injured tone, and thumping himself grandly upon the chest. "While Bras-de-Mort has a bullet for his musket, it is at her service."

"*Hein!* So I am to be Madame Bras-de-Mort, yes?" cried Cherie. "I thought you had no name, Monsieur. I assure you 'tis a good one and satisfies me. But if you had seen how well our friend defends herself, maybe you would not think it necessary to offer your deadly arm. Yellow Eyes would not think so."

It was the first time Nancy had heard the dumb man's name mentioned since her encounter with him on the deck. Now, as she glanced off down the beach, she saw him plowing along through the sand toward her.

CHAPTER VI

THE CASTLE ON THE HILL

TO ESCAPE the baneful eyes of the tongueless man, and the hideous sight of his fleshless skull and bloodshot lips, Mistress Nancy made a wide detour through the palm-trees, followed by Barney. She knew not whither she was going; her sole desire was to be alone, to collect her thoughts and have an opportunity to discuss in peace and quiet with the Irish boy plans for their escape, for that she would die rather than submit to the fate that awaited her here in Tortuga she was firmly resolved.

But the blood that had been resolute enough to send an English king to the scaffold flowed in the girl's veins. She felt a strengthening of all the fibers of her being under the pressure of her troubles, which, instead of making her weary, clarified her mind and gave her unwonted energy. First, to see in what sort of place she was, and to determine then what avenues of escape offered.

She was hungry, and Three-legs, the mastiff dog, which trotted at her side, looked up into her face with eloquent eyes which proclaimed in unmistakable language just what he would have thought of a bone. As for Barney, he had been half-starved so often that his stomach gave him little trouble, seeing that it expected nothing much of anything and was always as grateful as astonished at any titbit which came its way.

Still, they had eaten no food since the night before, when they had dined on a couple of biscuit and a little brandy and water in the bottom of their tankard. So they turned their attention to the beach where there was every evidence of culinary activity, and whence was wafted to them a delicious odor.

A great fire had been lighted in the open space between the sea and the cluster of shacks and huts which served the colonists for a town, a short distance from the water's edge. Over it a whole ox was roasting on an enormous spit, sending forth an aroma that, as they drew near, became maddening.

The blaze was surrounded by a noisy throng, those who had landed that day from the *Baptiste* mingling with their new-found friends and fellow-countrymen, who paid clumsy court to the women or fought among themselves for the favors of the more attractive ones, who, finding themselves eagerly sought after among so many men, were not slow to exercise those arts of coquetry best calculated to win for themselves the pick of the prospective husbands.

Scarcely a damsel but was surrounded by a dozen rough gallants, who proffered them the choicest cuts from the barbecue, offered them cups of wine from the casks which had been broached under the palm-trees, showering them at the same time with uncouth compliments and speeches that were as pretty as they, who had been so long outside the pale of civilization, knew, or remembered, how to make.

A squalid lot of wretches they were, too, the scrapings of the slums and alleys of

Europe, vagabonds and rascals, indentured servants escaped from their masters in Jamaica when Cromwell had added that island to England's overseas possessions; runaway slaves, who had been sold for debt at Port Royal; outcasts from the settlements in Virginia and New England; idlers, ne'er-do-wells, thieves, pickpockets, murderers, escaped felons, jailbirds from the hulks in the Mediterranean or from Newgate, the very scum of society, they had drifted to the Caribbean as froth collects at the center of a boiling pot. Some among them were soldiers, veterans of the wars which had convulsed Europe for a generation, whose campaigns had taught them only lessons of idleness and violence.

Finding Hispaniola, Spain's first great possession in the New World, all but deserted by the gold-mad adventurers who had pushed on to the Main in quest of vaster wealth, deserted but for a few settlements on the coast, the native population exterminated, and their places in the mines and on the plantations filled by negroes from the Guinea coast, and the whole island overrun by wild cattle and hogs, the progeny of domestic animals which had been brought over by those who had followed Columbus, these outcast derelicts had turned hunters of the wild bulls which they slew for their meat and hides.

Going off into the deep forests, two together, usually, for they hunted in couples, with their muskets and ammunition, and a pack of dogs to aid them in the chase, they would kill as many animals as sufficed for their needs, curing the meat after a fashion which had been learned from the Caribbee Indians. The beef, cut into long strips, was smoked or barbecued over a boucan, a grating of green sticks, so that the hunters became known as boucaniers, or, as the word was twisted by English tongues, buccaneers.

Nancy, joining the mob around the fire, thought she had never seen before such evil-looking fellows.

Soon she and Barney, wedging in among them, secured a chunk of smoking meat for themselves, and a juicy joint for Three-legs, and withdrawing to the shade of a near-by palm, with a basin of water to wash down their meal, munched away with the greatest contentment.

In this pleasant frame of mind Mistress Chillingworth, happening to look up, saw approaching her the man she least wished to see, Monsieur d'Ogeron, the Governor himself, grandly attired for the festivities, and smiling with satisfaction at the huge success of his undertaking now so happily consummated in the arrival of the cargo of brides from France.

"Hist!" whispered Barney, nudging her. "Here comes the Major of the island. They pointed him out to me a while ago. If you could get on the right side of him now, he could soon settle the question of going back to France."

"No, Barney, he will not help me," she answered. "He means me no good, I fear. My heart tells me to expect of him nought but ill. I have already craved of him the privilege of returning on the *Baptiste*, and it has been refused me."

D'Ogeron was now arrived at where they sat. Barney jumped to his feet, pulling his forelock and bowing. Nancy sat still and turned her face away.

"I am come to offer you the hospitality of the island, Mademoiselle," began the Governor. "Tortuga bids you welcome, and hopes that you will long abide with us here."

"You are kind, Monsieur," she replied with a touch of bitterness in her voice, "but I fear I can never be happy in this place, torn, as I have been, from home and kin. I beseech you to permit me to return on the ship."

D'Ogeron shook his head and cast at her a look which made her blood turn hot within her.

She arose abruptly, and when the Governor offered her his arm, she ran away, like an angry schoolgirl. Barney, with his fists doubled up and his brows scowling, and Three-legs, showing his white teeth over his curling lip, followed her, as if to serve notice that Mistress Nancy had two friends upon whom to count in an emergency.

She did not see d'Ogeron, stamping his foot with vexation, call up from the crowd a slouching fellow, and, pointing out to him the figure of the girl, say something in a low tone, which the man agreed to, as the shakes of his head indicated. Nor did she observe that this fellow, following her, kept her within his sight thereafter. But if she had noted these things it is doubtful if they would have made her feel less quiet than she was.

A BOY, girl and dog, were swallowed up in the crowd which grew more noisy with every fresh cask that, being rolled up from the rough storehouses that lined the shores of the cove, was stove in with shouts of glee and bursts of song. Singing, playing, scuffling, stuffing themselves with the good things from the feast which had been provided for the occasion, and washing out their dusty throats with great gulps of wine, their voices rose to a chorus that might have been heard at the other end of the island. The sailors from the ship had come among them and added their merrymaking to the general din.

Some of the women had already married the men who had chosen them, or fought for them. As Nancy approached one group, which seemed more quiet than the rest, she saw that the interest was centered in Cherie and Bras-de-Mort who were standing hand in hand beneath a palm, while the padre, the little French monk she had first seen in Lille, half tipsy, his round red face shining like a tropic moon, was reciting the marriage service, stumbling over the words by reason of having one eye on a cask that was being tapped by a couple of frolicking mariners.

A storm of cheers greeted the conclusion of the service, as every one rushed up helter-skelter to kiss the bride.

Cherie caught sight of Nancy's face, and slipping away came over to where she was standing and threw her arms around the girl's neck.

"I fear for you in all this madness, Mademoiselle," she said, a look of deep concern in her dark eyes. For myself—I am used to such orgies, and tired of them, too. Now, thank God, I feel a greater security than I have ever known. My husband is a man—a real man. You would scarcely believe me, Mademoiselle, but I am—happy. And he will protect you, too, my friend, never fear."

"I thank you both from the depths of my heart," said Nancy simply, kissing her, "but in the long run I must look out for myself, and that I shall do."

"You do not know what I know. I must warn you. The Governor has given it out that you are reserved for him."

"I have more than suspected as much."

"After all, if you could be philosophical about it, perhaps it would be the best thing. As the Governor's lady—well, there are compensations in that station."

"Not for me."

"Has he said aught to you?"

"His actions have spoken more plainly than words."

She turned, with a feeling that some one was looking at her, and saw the priest, and by his side d'Ogeron again.

The Governor tried now to take her by the hand, and securing it, sought to embrace her. But she tore herself away from his grasp, kicking and struggling, with such good purpose that finally she was able to wrench herself free. The crowd had closed in around them, hooting and jeering. The Governor's face was a thunder-cloud.

"A very wildcat of a woman, Monsieur," hiccoughed the monk, holding his cassock up about his knees as he jumped up and down with mirth. "By Our Lady! A wildcat! A tigress!"

"I shall tame her quickly enough," burst forth the Governor. "Out of my way, you beggars! Are these the best manners you have, that you should stand about gaping at me? As for you, Mademoiselle, the padre will accommodate us with the ritual within the hour."

He turned and strode away, nor vouchsafed any further wedding announcement.

The crowd drew back respectfully before Nancy, at this. "The Governor's lady! The Governor's lady!" she heard them saying, the words passing from lip to lip, until it seemed to have spread in a twinkling all over the island.

Scarce three hundred yards off shore, for the deep water made close in under the overhanging cliffs, lay the *Saint Jean Baptiste* in a very fair berth, anchors at bow and stern for fear of her being driven ashore in a sudden squall; so close in, that it seemed as if a stone might have been dropped upon her decks from the castle perched upon the hillside.

Nancy, wandering down to the beach with Barney and Three-legs, could come to no conclusion upon the situation in which she found herself. She had been given an hour, sixty minutes more of liberty, and then——

She shivered at the thought of the alternative as the words she had so bravely spoken that morning came rushing back upon her from her memory.

"No," she had said, "not while that cliff is yonder!"

Her eyes, fastened so longingly upon the ship in the harbor, she raised now to the fort and castle on the crest of the timbered, rocky steep which overhung the cove. And as she looked there flashed into her mind what Captain Jean had told her on shipboard that morning.

"Barney," she cried, turning to the Irish lad with sudden resolve in her eyes, "I am going to put my life and honor in your keeping. Do you know, lad, in that fort on the hill are thirty Englishmen, prisoners, destined for the hulks at Toulon."

"Thirty Englishmen!"

"Hush! Not so loud. Ay, thirty of our countrymen. For though we fight one another, Barney, we English and the Irish are of one blood when it comes to a foreign foe."

"Faith, and I guess that's so, true enough. But how came the English there?"

"Prisoners they are, lad, who refused to see Tortuga seized by the French, and so are going back in chains. It makes my blood steam to think of Englishmen in such a plight, but my own troubles made me forget them until now, fool and ingrate that I am. If they knew of my predicament I warrant they would not desert me."

"I see what you're driving at," he shouted, his eyes dancing.

"Shh!" she cautioned.

"It could be done!" Barney's voice sank to a whisper, and his red rag of a tongue licked his lips with delight. "By nightfall they will all be drunk."

" 'Tis what I had counted upon."

"And the sailors from the ship, they are ashore and busy at the wine-casks, too."

The boy's eyes narrowed to slits. Into the face of Nancy flamed a new light of hope and courage. The fighting blood of the Chillingworths was leaping through her veins.

"We must make it succeed, boy," she whispered, looking upward at the castle again.

"But the keys? We can not batter down walls of masonry."

"Then we shall have the keys some other way, Barney. And take this charge upon your soul: go among the men and learn what guard watches at the fort—and how many men have been left upon the ship. Leave the rest to me."

"Ay, that I will."

"Now, be off with you and mind you ask your questions sagely, that no one suspect your motive."

She watched the boy run off and disappear in the crowd, and then, following more slowly by another route, was soon in the midst of the merrymakers, searching from group to group, this time with no desire to conceal herself from Monsieur d'Ogeron.

Glancing back, her heart stood still when she saw a man creep from a thicket near where she had stood with Barney and come slinking along under the trees—a powerfully built man, with long arms, and a skull that shone in the fierce sunlight as if no shred of flesh covered the naked bone, a man whose yellow eyes she saw even at that distance gleaming like molten gold.

CHAPTER VII

SOMEBODY SETS A TRAP

THERE was something so sinister and furtive about Yellow Eyes's movements that for an instant fear raised its ugly head and laid a clammy hand upon Nancy's heart. Had she been spied upon? Had the plot she and Barney laid so carefully and boldly been disclosed?

She watched him, fascinated, to see if she could discover in his actions anything to answer the questions that concerned her now so deeply. He was coming closer to her, until she could see the wicked glitter in those burning eyes, the toothless gums, the great, red throat of him, for his mouth was opened wide, and he was panting from his exertions and the heat, panting without a tongue.

He passed her, and she read in the yellow orbs which glowed in his head a message as plainly writ as if it had been upon the printed page of a book, as she had read his silent commands when she lay in the straw in the cart, and knew as well as if he had spoken that he would kill her if she did not lie still.

Three-legs, who had followed her, and was resting himself on his haunches at her feet and licking the stump of his leg which was now almost healed, showed his teeth and would have sprung upon his enemy had not the girl held him back by main strength, both hands grasping the loose skin of his neck.

Yellow Eyes passed on with a parting leer, his strange eyes, which she sought in vain to avoid, now burning almost red like coals upon a forge, and left her standing there in deep perplexity. And thus d'Ogeron found her, lost in reverie.

She saw that he had dressed himself in finery in the mode, which, she made no doubt, had been brought to him from Paris on the *Baptiste*. It was a scarlet riding-suit, with black silk stockings, and a new short coat, which was just then becoming fashionable. His hat was a felt, broad of brim, and with a great plume upon it which became him handsomely. There was also a sword at his side, a slender blade, with a jeweled hilt that sparkled in the sun.

"I trust that Mademoiselle has lost her sulks," he smiled pleasantly enough, although his eyes were cold. "I assure you, they are not becoming to so charming a creature. May I hope that we have made you feel at home?"

"Monsieur has been most kind," she answered. "I am most grateful."

"Your words delight me, my dear."

He moistened his lips as if he would say something more, and then, hesitating, offered her his arm in silence, and this time, dropping him a courtesy, she took it and fell into step with him at his side. They passed among the rough crew of roysterers, who winked and smirked at them knowingly, until the rosy blood mantled her face and she hung her head, pretending not to hear the coarse jests and compliments showered upon them.

"The monk," said d'Ogeron presently, "awaits your pleasure. I need not tell you how eager I am to hear pronounced those words which will entitle me to give you that protection which one so beautiful and charming, so unfortunately situated as I realize you are, deserves at my hands. *Sacre!* I hope the marriage service has not been worn out. Truly, it has been put to a strain this day. Fifty happy couples billing and cooing in Tortuga today, where only yesterday were but rough men fighting and quarreling with one another.

"Behold these smiling brides and happy bridegrooms! And soon we shall be numbered among the lot. Come, Mademoiselle, impatience fires my very soul. I long to make you happy."

"That you can do very easily, Monsieur."

"Ah! It is my one wish."

"Then bid me depart in peace, Monsieur."

"*Sacrê bleu!* Have I not said that is impossible?"

"I can not live here in this rough place," she answered. "I should die of exposure in one of these huts."

"Huts! *Mon Dieu*, think you the Governor of Tortuga lives in a shack like a common cattle-hunter? Your nest will be yonder, in the castle on the hill, Mademoiselle. The 'Dove-Cote' it was called by my predecessor, Levasseur, who erected the fort there, and how appropriately!"

"Fort?" she queried. "I thought I understood you to say 'castle,' M'sieu."

"*Oui.* It is the same thing, part castle, part fort, my residence and the defense of Tortuga as well."

"But I should die in those stone walls."

"*Diable!* Die? Stone walls? In this climate? I will surround you with all the luxuries of Europe and the Indies. You shall dress in silks and satins, sleep in a bed a viceroy's wife bemoans this very minute, have slaves to wait upon you. That castle is a storehouse of treasure, Mademoiselle, packed with the riches plundered from a dozen galleons by these brave freebooters of mine, and brought here for safe keeping."

"I fear you do exaggerate, Monsieur, to tempt me. It seems strange that so much wealth should be in a place like this."

"Exaggerate! Your own eyes shall see to your satisfaction."

"Ay, but then 'twill be too late."

"Why, a hundred men could tell you that I speak the truth. *Sacrê!* Come see for yourself."

"Whither, Monsieur?"

"To the castle."

"Now?"

"That is it. Some day there will be a road up the cliff. At present you must climb."

"That I can do very easily."

"You will go, then?"

"Of course."

"'Twill give you an opportunity, too, to change your dress for the wedding. You shall select what you wish from my chests, and garb yourself befitting your station. Stupid! I should have thought of it before. Shall we start at once?"

"With all my heart," replied Nancy.

Her voice now was soft, low, caressing. She gave him a look from her wide blue eyes that dazzled him and set him to pulling at his mustache with vast content.

"Then I am at your service."

"Let me first tell my comrade that I am going," she parried, for she now perceived Barney at a little distance off, signaling to her.

She nodded to the Governor, and running down the beach, with Three-legs leaping and barking behind, came up with the boy, panting and out of breath.

"How now, Barney?" she asked in a half-whisper, and laughing in spite of herself at his appearance, for his shock of red hair was so brushed up around his ears and over his forehead that it looked like a flaming battle-flag.

"We're in luck," he chuckled gleefully. "Things couldn't be better. The fort is all but deserted. Six men were left on guard when the watch changed at noon, but four have sneaked down for the rum and wine and women, and the other two must be pretty tipsy by this time, for they have had a cask sent up to them."

"And how of the ship, lad?"

"I'm coming to that. The English prisoners are in the pit in the fortified side of the castle, facing the sea. And you were right about it—there are thirty of them. How they can be got at I know not."

"I will attend to that. But of the ship. Didst thou learn aught of the ship?"

"Ay, that I did. All have come ashore save the middle watch, and that greatly reduced; and of those aboard, most have had their turn ashore and have gone back full of food and drink to the ears. The first of the ebb will be at eleven tonight."

"You have thought of everything, Barney!" exclaimed Nancy, her eyes dancing. "Now pay strict heed to what I say. Do you keep Three-legs with you. Now, I am going alone to the fort with the Governor. Nay, look not anxious, lad. I go at his request and of my own free will. When we have been gone the space of one-half glass—canst judge the time, Barney? I warrant you you can. Well then, when I have been gone for half an hour, do you and the dog follow us. Three-legs will find the path by our scent."

"Then what?"

"We must be guided by circumstances, Barney. When you reach the castle, place yourself in a secluded place as near the entrance as you can safely lie. And if all goes well with me, I will contrive to let you in or make a signal to you. Much depends on you, Barney boy, more than you know."

"I would lay down my life for you," he answered simply, and neither of them knew then what those words were to mean to both of them.

She grasped his hand at this. Not the soft clasp of a woman did she give him, but the hearty grip of a friend and comrade. She turned away and waved her hand to him, and went back to where the Governor stood, and there beside him was Yellow Eyes, tugging at his sleeve and gesticulating vigorously.

YELLOW EYES pointed to the girl as she came up, and from her leveled his bony index finger at the castle on the hill. His burnished eyes seemed afire, his purple lips were twisted and distorted, his tongueless gullet filled with slobber; so disgusting a sight that even d'Ogeron turned away, and tried to push the fellow off.

"*Mon dieu!*" he cried to Nancy, "the rogue is trying to tell me something, but hath not the tongue for his words. What ails thee, wretch? *Sacré!* His eyes pierce my very soul. I think he hath something to say of the castle, but what I know not. Is it of the castle? Speak, thou rascal!"

Yellow Eyes nodded.

"Ah, I was right then. Well, what is it? What is it, I say!"

He roared at him again in a voice of rage, as if by the volume of the sound he made he could give the dumb man tongue. And Yellow Eyes merely grimacing at this, and shaking his head, and pointing still at Nancy and the castle, the Governor suddenly seized him, and shoved him aside.

"Out of my way, rogue. Never, I swear, have I seen so evil a sight. Ha! He understands what I say, well enough. But, of course, he is not dumb from birth, but only because his tongue hath been clipped and so is not a mute. Never mind! Some other time, fellow, you may tell me what you want to say."

But Yellow Eyes, not to be put off so easily, grasped Nancy's arm. She wrenched away. Thinking the man was showing a persistence that might endanger her project, she said:

"'Tis the fellow I fought with on shipboard, Monsieur. I suspect he is making a complaint to you against me."

Yellow Eyes quivered with passion at this.

"So that's it!" cried d'Ogeron, the impetuous lover getting the better of the prudent Governor. "Off with you, fellow, and let me not see your hideous face again!"

He offered Nancy his arm and escorted her across the open space between the storehouses and the rough huts which composed the settlement.

The day had run its course, and the tropic night which drops so quickly when the sun goes down was all about them with its blackness, shot here and there by murky glares where bonfires blazed on the beach, and by the flickering light of torches. The rough cattle-hunters, who played as strenuously as they worked at their trade in the forests, were still making the island resound with their song and laughter. Now and then they were obliged to step over the recumbent forms of men who had stretched themselves upon the ground to rest from their mad pleasures, or else because of the wine and brandy which had been drunk in such vast quantities that day. It is doubtful if ever an equal number of men and women in all the world had ever consumed so much in the same space of time.

Nancy, looking about as she walked along, saw neither Cherie nor Bras-de-Mort. She hoped that they had withdrawn from the scene of these orgies, for she had come to feel for the little Parisienne a deep sympathy, and wished that she would be happy with her husband, so strangely found in the New World. Most of the other women were keeping up the festivities as eagerly as their companions, nor were they the less backward at the wine-casks.

At the foot of the cliff, where a well-worn path led upward through the trees, the Governor, in his hand a torch he had taken from the crotch of a cedar, went ahead, and, bidding her follow, began the ascent, not without many gasps and sighs, for he was a portly fellow with a big paunch and short legs, and the way was steep. Never a word they said as they toiled upward.

After pursuing the path for some little distance, they came to rough steps hewn in the rock, and climbing these for about half the height of the promontory, d'Ogeron came to a halt upon a little platform, puffing from his exertions.

"From here we climb," he announced briefly, holding the torch aloft, and Nancy saw the rungs of an iron ladder leading upward through the trees and heavy undergrowth which clung to the sides of the cliff.

"Very good, Monsieur," she answered him; and so they started once more, hand over hand, foot over foot, until at last they came out into a little clearing where the trees had been hacked away.

The girl, straining her eyes to take in every detail, noted closely the position of the rude fort, or castle as the Governor called it, perched upon the mountainside, its gray walls of stone and heavy timbers bathed in a flood of moonlight. In the harbor below them she saw the ghostly outlines of the ship, swinging at her cables, every mast and spar outlined in the soft, silvery radiance.

One part of the fort she observed—all this while the Governor struggled to regain his breath—was on a lower level than the rest, being flush with the precipice, which dropped off abruptly at its foundations; for this reason, and because there were no windows in it that she could see, she concluded that in this part was located the pit that Barney had spoken of, by which she supposed he had meant a dungeon. Through portholes showed the muzzles of two cannon, commanding the harbor.

D'Ogeron beckoned to her, and, still in silence, for he needed his breath for other purposes, marched with a great show of dignity to the heavy oaken door of the place, and pounding upon it with the hilt of his sword, motioned her in when it had swung open.

A black man with a torch stood in the gloomy aperture. He fastened the door behind them by dropping a heavy bar into place through iron hooks on either side of the frame, and then showed the way down a long stone-flagged passageway, and, through another door, which opened off at one side, into a large chamber with a ceiling of hewn beams in the French style, panels of the same wood, and a stone floor covered with sand and rushes. In the center was a table laid with covers for three, and at the place at the side sat the round-faced monk, the leg of a roasted fowl in one hand and a goblet of wine in the other. Beside his chair in a deferential attitude stood a little chap in a dirty smock, with a platter of meat in his hands from which he was preparing to serve the guest, who was clamoring loudly for food. At the fireplace on the other side of the room a young pig was roasting on a spit, and above it hung a musket on two pegs.

"*Mon dieu!* Monk, couldst not wait for the wedding feast to begin before stuffing thyself?" exploded the Governor. "One would think you had tasted nothing for a week, yet I myself have seen thee gorging thyself this whole day long."

The monk turned a sheepish countenance toward them at this interruption, and hastily dropped the chicken-bones beneath the table.

"Wedding feast!" cried Nancy. "What mean you by this, Monsieur?"

The look on the Governor's face told her plainly that she had been trapped.

Meanwhile, on the beach, down under the castle, Barney and the dog lay in the soft sand, silence and darkness all around them. When he judged that half a glass might have run its course, he arose softly to his feet, skirted the crowd of merrymakers, who still kept up their singing and shouting, and began working his way to the foot of the path.

Under a genipa-tree a sailor lay sleeping, exhausted by his day of debauchery, his head pillowed upon his arm. Barney glanced about him stealthily, and observing no one near, bent down, and feeling in the mariner's shirt possessed himself of his knife and pistol.

This done, he vanished into the shadows at the foot of the cliff, and began to climb, Three-legs sniffing the ground eagerly. Suddenly the dog whined, and Barney grasped him by the muzzle just in time to choke back a bark.

"What is it, boy?" he whispered. "What's the matter, old fellow?"

He seized the dog's scruff tightly in his hand to keep him from bounding away, and then, looking upward through the trees, saw, in a clearing where a little of the moonlight sifted through the branches, the furtive figure of a man slinking up the stone steps, a grotesque figure with the head and shoulders of a Hercules and the pendulant arms of some monster ape, the sinister figure of Yellow Eyes, the tongueless man, creeping noiselessly, now hidden by the gnarled trunks of palms and cedars, again showing for an instant in the shimmering moonlight, like some uncanny beast in the jungle.

Boy and dog followed as closely behind him as Barney dared to go. When they reached the bottom of the ladder they saw him far above them, and by the time the Irish lad had half-carried the three-legged mastiff up the iron rounds, the dumb man had disappeared, nor could he see him anywhere upon the top of the precipice, at the castle door.

CHAPTER VIII

A VOICE IN THE DARK

"BE SEATED, Mademoiselle." D'Ogeron bowed, and motioned her to the table. "The wedding feast awaits. I hope the viands will tickle your appetite."

"The capon!" interrupted the monk, carving off another leg of the fowl and thrusting it into the yawning jaws of his red face, which shone as if it had been greased. "Never have I tasted such a bird. Seasoned? Fit for a king! And the sauce, Mademoiselle! And the fish. Such a fish! And a pig or a kid or something upon the spit. How it salutes my nostrils!"

He shook his head, as much as to say that further words had failed him, and rolling his eyes at her, drained the wine-glass at a gulp and motioned to the little man in the smock to fill it up again.

"What means this, Monsieur?" demanded Mistress Chillingworth, drawing her slim figure up very straight. "I came not here for a wedding feast, but to inspect that wealth with which you promised to endow me. Is this the return I am to receive for the faith I reposed in you? I trusted to your gallantry as a Frenchman, Monsieur, for better treatment."

D'Ogeron shrugged his shoulders.

"Love and war know no conscience," he answered. "If I did deem it best to hasten the happy hour of our nuptials, it is for you to bow to my superior wisdom. Be assured I have not acted as I have without a view to your happiness and safety. I admired you from the moment I saw you, Mademoiselle. You seemed to me to be so friendless, my pity was enlisted in your behalf. You are among rough men, my dear child, men who would hesitate at nothing. I offer you my protection and my love."

"Love! You know not the meaning of the word. Things have come to a pretty pass, methinks, when cowards prate of love."

D'Ogeron's face darkened at this. Drawing back a chair, he curtly motioned her to be seated.

"Enough, Mademoiselle! You mock the honor I would pay you. Better the Governor's lady than a courtesan on the streets of Paris."

The girl's whole body quivered at this indignity, as if she had felt the lash of a whip across her face, and when the Frenchman threw his arm about her waist and tried to draw her to him, she squirmed out of his grasp, and bending suddenly, gave him a sharp blow behind the knees that sent him sprawling, so astonished that he was speechless.

He lay there blinking at her, the room in silence, save for Nancy's heavy breathing, the monk with a chicken-wing half-way to his mouth, when there came suddenly a loud knock at the door.

Scrambling to his feet with the assistance of the slave who had grasped him by the shoulders, d'Ogeron bade the black man see who might be there. And so they waited, each trying to solve in his own way the cause of the interruption.

Presently, when they had heard the door creak and then the fall of the bar into its sockets, the inner door swung open, and Yellow Eyes was there upon the threshold, rubbing his hands and leering at them with those twin orbs like melted gold.

"*Diable!*" cried the Governor. " 'Tis the dumb man. What want you here, rogue? Did I not tell you upon the beach to get thee gone? By the Virgin! How he gibbers. Curses on your impudence, fellow, be off with you before I have my servants throw you out."

Yellow Eyes stood looking from one to the other, an inarticulate gurgle in his empty throat, his toothless gums opening and shutting.

"Canst hear what I say, knave?" shouted the Governor.

Yellow Eyes nodded his fleshless skull.

"Then out with it! Out with it, I say? You torture me with my inability to understand what those great eyes of yours are saying; though, by the Holy Virgin! I believe he doth try to speak of the English dogs in the dungeon."

A great wagging of Yellow Eyes's head, his molten eyes turning red with a strange, new light which flamed into them.

"*Sacre!* It is the prisoners. Is that right, rogue?"

Another nod from Yellow Eyes.

"Mother of Mary! What is it, then. Speak, I tell you—speak!" roared the Governor in a very rage by this time.

"Hein! He can not speak better for your yells, though you shouted yourself as dumb as he is," broke in the monk. He poured a great goblet of wine, and drained it, and smacked his lips. "*Mon dieu!* Maybe the fellow can write if he can not talk."

"Curse my soul, monk, but thou art the very devil for ideas," cried d'Ogeron. "Canst write, knave?"

Yellow Eyes shook his head that he could not.

"Curse thee for the blockhead that thou art!"

"Let me try him," interrupted the monk, putting down his chicken-bones and licking his fingers, while Nancy threw at him a glance of alarm. "It is about the Englishmen you would speak?"

A nod of assent from Yellow Eyes.

"Something the Governor wants to know?"

Another nod, more vigorous than the previous one.

"Important?"

Still another nod.

"Ah! We are getting at something. Now, what next?" He wrinkled his forehead and licked his greasy fingers reflectively. "Nice Englishmen?" he queried, while a silly smile overspread his shiny face at his own question.

"Nice grandmother!" snorted the Governor, but Yellow Eyes shaking his head so violently in disapproval of the suggestion that the English prisoners were nice, both d'Ogeron and the monk looked at him in amazement as he leveled his bony finger full at Nancy.

She had been standing at the table, on the side nearest the fireplace, and d'Ogeron, moving excitedly from her side toward Yellow Eyes, she sprang at this to the fireplace, seized the musket, and presented it full at the Governor's head in such a way that the muzzle commanded Yellow Eyes as well.

"If anybody in this room moves a step without my permission I will kill him!" she said. "Stir a step, and I will blow the top of your head off."

Without turning her head to look at him, she addressed the little man in the dirty smock who was standing behind the monk's chair.

"Are you not a Fleming?" she asked in Dutch, for she had lived long in Flanders and spoke that language, and Spanish, as well as French and her own tongue.

"Yes," answered the man, his face brightening, but keeping a nervous eye upon d'Ogeron, nevertheless.

"I made sure of it when first I saw you. Can your master speak your language?"

"No."

"Nor the monk?"

"No."

"Is your master kind and good to you?"

The man hesitated, a look of fear in his eyes. "No," he replied faintly.

"Would you escape if chance offered you the opportunity?"

"*Ja.* With all my heart!"

"And the black man. Is he, too, anxious to regain his liberty?"

"He weeps all day for his wife and baby. He is not happy here."

"Where are they?"

"I do not know. Somewhere on the Gold Coast."

"Can you speak his language, or he yours?"

"I have taught him a few words; he has taught me some of his."

"Tell him from me that if he will do as I say this night, I will give him his liberty. Ay, if I have to take him back to Africa myself, I will restore him to his wife and baby if he will but obey me in everything I command."

The little Fleming spoke a few guttural words to the negro, who showed his white teeth in a broad grin and answered him, edging away the while from his master.

"I could not explain all to him," said the Flem; "he said he would follow me in all things. I can trust him."

"Tell him to unbar the great door and whistle thrice."

The Fleming repeated the message.

"He says he can not whistle. He does not know how to do it; I can not make him understand."

"Then, do you go. Simply unbar the great door and whistle thrice, as loudly as you can; then leave the door unbarred, and return here."

D'Ogeron's face was purple with rage. Now, as his serving man began creeping toward the door, keeping his back always to the wall, he burst forth in a perfect storm of anger.

"Strike her down, you scullion!" he roared. " 'Tis a woman, fool—a chit of a girl. Throw thyself upon her."

The Fleming stopped irresolute, rooted in his tracks, and gave Nancy a look from his eyes in which she saw fear and doubt.

"Throw thyself upon her, varlet! Do you value your own wretched life above your master's? Tomorrow you shall swing for this."

"Do not fear him, my friend," said Nancy, smiling encouragement. "Tomorrow we shall be far away from here, and he can not harm you."

The man moved toward the door. And now he would have to pass Yellow Eyes, who stood nearest to the opening.

"Hear you, dumb man," admonished the girl, "if you seek to hinder him in any way be assured I shall kill thee if it take the only charge in my musket to do it."

Yellow Eyes did not stir. The Fleming reached the door, darted out and disappeared in the passageway without, and she heard him unbarring the great door, and, immediately thereafter, the sound of three long whistles came faintly to her ears.

"Strike her down, monk!" cried the Governor. "She durst not harm a man of your cloth. Perdition take you! Do something, I say! *Sacrê!* Excommunicate her, monk!"

The monk at this, with a wild look about him slid under the table with an agility that he would not have been given credit for, and presently, everything remaining quiet, his hairy arm appeared above the board, groped around among the dishes, found a bottle which he tightly clutched, and that too disappeared. Whereupon the silence was broken by a gurgling sound, and an instant later by footsteps in the passage and the bark of a dog, and Barney burst into the room, Three-legs at his heels.

THE three-legged mastiff crouched, as if to hurl himself at the throat of Yellow Eyes, while the Irish lad, seeing d'Ogeron held under the muzzle of Nancy's musket, put his pistol at the black man's head and his knife at the pit of his stomach.

"How now, Barney!" cried Nancy. "Would you kill our good friend? Have a care, the black man is on our side. You look after Yellow Eyes."

She bade the Fleming procure all the cordage he could find, and the man, disappearing and coming back in a moment with an armful of ropes, he and Barney first tied the feet of Yellow Eyes, then tripped him, and wound him round with cords, and rolled him into a corner.

"And now, Monsieur," she said, addressing the Governor, from whose face she had never once taken her eyes, and stepping closer to him, so that the muzzle of her barrel was but a foot from his heart, "it is your turn."

D'Ogeron gulped down the anger that all but choked him.

"The English prisoners!" He finally managed to gasp out. "So that is your plot—and that is what the dumb man with the yellow eyes would have told me. Fool! Fool that I was. The English prisoners! Well, what if you do relieve them? My cattle-hunters will tear them limb from limb."

"That is as it may be," replied Nancy coolly, "but if they did it would be the first time that men of your race had got the better of men of mine. You forget that there is a ship in the harbor, Monsieur, and that my countrymen are the greatest sailors in all the world. And now—the keys."

"What keys?"

"Those to the dungeon where the prisoners are kept."

"And what if I refuse?"

"I will kill you and then batter down the walls."

"*Mon dieu!* I believe you would. Mademoiselle, I will set the English prisoners free and let them depart in peace for the colony in Jamaica if you will but remain here with me and be my wife."

"Time passes swiftly, Monsieur — the keys, at once!"

"Then let me pass, Mademoiselle; they are in my private apartment."

"Is that true?" asked Nancy, in Dutch, without looking behind her, never taking her eyes from the Governor's face.

"He wears them in his belt," replied the Fleming, in French, so that d'Ogeron, favoring him with a particularly vicious look, drew them forth and hurled them to the floor.

"Now Barney," said the girl softly, in English, "do you slip up behind him and deal him a blow with the butt of thy pistol. It grieves me to have it done, but 'tis the only way, for I fear the consequences did he ever come to close quarters with me."

"Faith! I long for the chance," answered the Irish lad, his million freckles blending into one great one, and then disappearing behind his mouth which opened in such a grin that it completely obliterated the rest of his features.

He passed softly behind the Governor, nonchalantly, as if inspecting the beamed ceiling, and then dealt him a blow behind the ear that stretched him senseless upon the floor.

Then they fell upon him, tying his wrists and feet, and winding him about with ropes, and stuffed a gag in his mouth, and so left him there. Nancy secured the keys, and, guided by the Fleming, they started from the room.

"Hist!" cried Barney, as they reached the door. "We'd better go back—we forgot to gag the dumb man."

"Don't be silly, Barney," laughed the girl, and the Irish boy looking foolish and downcast at this sally, she threw her arms about him impulsively and hugged him. "You are a brave lad, Barney boy," she whispered, "and from my heart I thank you. But we idle. There is much to be done before the night is over."

And so they rushed out, pell-mell, across the passage, down a flight of stone steps, along another shorter corridor, the negro going ahead with a link-light to show the way. Another flight of stairs leading downward, and they came to an iron door set into the solid masonry.

They had barely got this open with one of the keys from the Governor's bunch, when the light blew out in the sudden draft which greeted them.

"No time to go back for another light," commanded the girl. "We must go on in the dark."

They felt their way through a chamber so large that Nancy could touch no wall by stretching forth her arms on either side. At the far end they reached still another iron door, with a grating of iron bars in the upper half.

"In there," whispered the Fleming.

Nancy, feeling for the lock, took the key he indicated.

"Holloa!" she called. "Men of England! A friend to the rescue!"

"Bully for you, Devon," answered a man's voice from the darkness. "A Devonshire voice that, and a woman's to boot, or you can keel-haul me."

The man's tones, so rich and deep and vibrant, thrilled her and set her heart to beating as it had never beat before.

"Aye, sir," she answered, "an English girl. Follow me at once—there's no time to be lost."

"Right you are," replied the voice in the dark. "Ho, lads! Tumble up there, my hearties! Here's an English girl come to steer us out of this beastly hole."

A SHE had found the lock now, and thrusting the key in, threw open the door. As it swung back creaking and grinding on its hinges she heard the rush of men's feet upon the stone passageway, engulfed in blackness, which yawned mysteriously in front of her.

"Steady, lads!" commanded the vibrant voice again, while Nancy, as the sound of it bathed her soul with a new and strange delight, felt a sense of strength and confidence take possession of her whole being. "Line up, men, and answer to your names."

The corridor was suddenly full of invisible forms. Then the voice in the dark again—

"Will Johnson?"

"Aye!"

"Jim!"

"Aye!"

"Trueheart Jackson!"

"Aye, sir!"

"Jim Rimble, are you there?"

"Well I should kiss a pig!"

"Then stand in the doorway here and tally the men off as they come out, lest one be asleep in the dark and left behind. Count me as one."

He stepped into the dark chamber beside her, and the girl felt him touch her shoulder, and then grasp her hand silently with a clasp of comradeship, and manliness, and vigor that went straight to her heart.

"Thirty right—all accounted for, sir," said another voice from the depths of the gloom.

"Very good, Jim Rimble. Now do you take up the end of the line. Forward, men—softly, lads, softly. Lead on, Devonshire girl!"

They felt their way along the corridor, back over the route by which they had come, Nancy, Barney, the black man and the Fleming going ahead, with Three-legs sniffing along in front, his scruff in the boy's fingers, the Englishmen marching along after in single file. Up the steps, down the long corridor they crept. More steps to be stumbled over, the men admonishing one another to be quiet and making all the more noise for their pains.

In front of the door to the big room Nancy stopped, pushed it open, and stepped quickly within. The link-lights still burned as brightly as before, and the fire on the hearth was blazing, the crisped pig sending forth an acrid odor of burnt meat.

D'Ogeron lay where she had left him, bound and gagged. He had come to his senses, and glared at her in impotent rage, struggling frantically to free himself. The feet of the monk stuck out from beneath the table on one side, and from the other a long, hairy, red arm and a grimy hand, still clasping a bottle by the neck. His snores, and grunts, and groans, and rumblings filled the chamber like the music of a pipe organ in a cathedral.

But where was Yellow Eyes? Gone! Only a patch of blood on the sand and reeds to show where he had lain, and beside it the ropes from which he had freed himself. That he had not stopped to liberate the Governor she attributed to the fact that he had probably heard them coming just as he had succeeded in working loose. So she concluded he had taken but a short start of them. She sprang back into the corridor, as the head of the line came up.

"Quickly, men!" she shouted. " 'Tis life or death now. One has escaped who will spread the alarm."

She sped down the corridor which led to the great door, the men swift in her wake. And they were soon in the little clearing on the crest of the mountain. The moon was gone, and where she had ridden a bank of clouds reared their angry thunder-heads. The night was thick around them.

"Men!" called Nancy. "There's work ahead of you this night. There's a ship in the harbor to be taken. She lies close in, with only half a watch aboard, and they drunk."

"Drunk!" cried a husky voice at her side. "Some men get all the luck in this world."

"Silence! Jim Rimble." The vibrant voice that Nancy had come to know so well had a ring of command in it, and Jim

Rimble subsided with a parting protest as to how he would kiss a pig.

"How's the tide?" asked the vibrant voice.

"It should have just turned ebb," she answered, straining her eyes for him in the darkness.

"Then we have luck with us—all but Jim Rimble." The men laughed at this sally. "Now then, lads, one foot right after the other now, and don't go to sleep on the path. Lead on Devon, and we will take a dozen ships do you but say the word."

"Are any of you armed?" asked the girl.

"All armed," laughed the voice.

"Good!" she cried. "For the island swarms with cattle-hunters and buccaneers. Armed with what?"

"British fists," laughed the voice again, while the men shouted.

"Fists!"

"Aye. Don't you worry about our arms, my girl."

"I have a musket, and thought you would care to take it from me."

"A good idea. Pass it to me, lads."

"And the boy here hath a pistol and a knife."

"Pass 'em along, too, little 'un."

"Faith! that I won't," rebelled Barney. "—— my eyes if you get my pistol—but here's the knife." He handed it to the man nearest him.

"All ready, Devon?"

"All ready! And we must go straight over the face of the cliff."

"Why not by the path—we know it well?"

"The whole island is gathered at the settlement below, feasting and drinking."

"Feasting" — it was the husky voice again—"and drinking! I say, fellows, we ought to go down and clean up the whole gang of 'em."

"Avast there, Jim Rimble. The maid is right. Over the cliff, lads, and step lively."

So they went scrambling through the undergrowth, clinging to the rocks and roots and branches of trees, and the thick tropical vines which grew in a network over the side of the mountain, Nancy and Barney, with Three-legs between them, helping the crippled dog who was hard put to find a grip for his toes and whined and moaned continuously.

Every man for himself it was, in that mad tumble through the jungle, until they came out at last upon the hard sand beach at the foot of the precipice, where they counted noses and found they had lost not a man in the descent, mad and reckless as it had been.

Nancy and Barney undertaking to locate the small boats which had been drawn up on shore, went away now, and in the mouth of a little creek where they had landed from the ship earlier in the day, they found a longboat hauled up, and so, spying out no other, Barney went back for the men and brought them up.

The fires on the beach had burned themselves out, so that they were in little danger of detection as they slunk along, bending low, as close to the water's edge as they could get. Up above them, on the rising grassy ground in the center of the settlement, a huge bonfire was still blazing, and the merrymakers were still at their drinking and carousing, for their songs and laughter floated down to them.

Some of the men were for going up in a body, in a sudden rush, and squaring accounts with the French buccaneers, but the wiser among them prevailed upon the rash.

Nancy, having located the position of the longboat, ran up to it and had laid hold upon the gunwale when a figure, seated in the shadows of the bow, rose with a scream of surprise.

Nancy jumped back, her heart beating wildly; and then she laughed and sprang forward eagerly. It was Cherie, and with her, as Nancy saw upon a closer look, her new-found husband, Bras-de-Mort, stretched out in the bottom of the boat, his head in her lap.

"Pardon me, my friends," said the girl, smiling. "I did not know I would disturb a courting couple here at such an hour, and right sorry I am to interrupt you. But I needs must have your trysting place."

"Have our trysting place!" cried Bras-de-Mort. "You speak in riddles, Mademoiselle."

"Aye, the boat—and urgently do I need it, too."

"For what, Mademoiselle? You astound me."

"To sail away in, to be sure. What else should I want with a boat?"

"Sail away in! Why, Mademoiselle, the tide has gone out so far now you could not budge it."

"Na'theless, an' it shall be budged, never fear. I have turned loose the English prisoners in the fort—and here they come now." And with this up they came in a rush, Bras-de-Mort leaping to his feet and putting himself upon the defensive."

"Nay, friend, for my sake!" cried Cherie, laying her hand upon her husband's arm. "Desist, I pray you, and make no alarm. The girl hath found means to escape from this frightful place, even as you and I but a moment since were wishing we might do."

"An' that be your wish, 'tis easily enough granted," said Nancy. "For we propose to seize the ship and go away."

The men had hurled themselves upon the boat by now, lifting it in their strong arms, and bore it to the water and launched it, Cherie in her amazement remaining still in the bow. Bras-de-Mort had jumped upon the beach.

Some among the Englishmen knew him, and hailed him, and offered him passage with them did he choose to go, seeing that he was a friend of the English girl.

Then they scrambled into the boat and got out the oars.

"Be quick, my friends," said Nancy. "You have but a moment to make your choice."

"*Sacre bleu!* I am a fatalist," said the Frenchman with a shrug, and waded out to shove off, as there came from the settlement the sound of a shot and the roar of men's voices.

"Yellow Eyes hath found a way to give the alarm," cried Nancy, "or else a spy hath come down to where we are and disclosed our purpose to the rest. Pull, men!"

THEY bent to the oars, and the longboat shot down the creek on the ebbing tide, Bras-de-Mort in the stern where he had hurled himself at the first alarm. Torches were gleaming now among the palm-trees, and presently a volley of musket-balls whistled over their heads. It was lighter over the water, away from the shadow of the thick tropical forest of the island, so that they had no difficulty in making out the ship's lights.

By the time the cattle-hunters on shore could load their pieces and fire again, they were under her stern. Dropping noiselessly along the ship's side, they made fast at the beak-head, and so gained the deck over the forecastle.

Nancy, Three-legs in her lap, felt herself lifted in a pair of strong arms, so that she was able to half-push, half-throw the mastiff aboard, and then, clambering up by the mainstay and the foretacks, followed him. The men did not wait to go up by the ladder, but clinging to the scupper-leathers, dragged themselves up in a twinkling.

Two of the watch came running forward at all the commotion they made, sleepy-eyed, and wondering. They went down like ninepins, and rolled into the scuppers.

Nancy, hearing at her side the husky voice which she recognized as Jim Rimble's expressing to himself a doubt as to whether or not he would find a bottle of brandy handy, turned in time to see him leap forward upon a familiar figure. It was Pierre, the bushy-bearded Pierre, and although she could not see him very clearly in the darkness, she fancied that his little eyes were blinking and snapping with a rapidity unusual even for him.

She shouted out a warning to him, and Pierre, recognizing her voice and comprehending at last that the ship was taken, disappeared into the forecastle like a frightened rat.

Another volley sang out ashore, and they could see the flashes of fire from the muskets. But they were too far off now to worry as to this. He of the vibrant voice hurled a dozen quick commands at the men, who answered him with cheery "Aye, aye, sirs."

"Pass the cable along aft there, boys," he called in the darkness. "Walk it along! Walk it along! Lay aloft aft there, you lubbers. Take the gaskets off those sails and let everything go by the board. How's your wheel there, Mr. Helmsman?"

Nancy and Barney sprang for the wheel and put it hard to port. Her stern came around at this, and the *Baptiste* dropped down the cove on the ebbing tide. Outside, clear of the land, a flying, light breeze laid her over.

"What's the matter with the old tub?" shouted the voice again. "She's as light as an empty jug."

"All her cargo has been unladed," Nancy called to him.

"I thought so. Boys, look alive now, I say, you've got your work cut out for you this night."

The last man to come aboard, the fellow to whom Barney had passed his knife on the top of the hill, had cut the painter and set the longboat adrift. A man who had been swimming in their wake as they had rowed out to the ship came up as the barkentine got under way, and, grasping the trailing rope-end, hauled himself aboard. His head showed for an instant against the skyline as he climbed, dripping and bedraggled, over the rail, a pasty-colored, almost fleshless head, like a raw skull, in which two eyes gleamed as brilliantly as burnished gold.

"Look, Barney! See there!" whispered Nancy.

"Faith! Let me go and pitch him overboard," he answered softly, while the hair on Three-legs' neck bristled, as he growled and showed his fangs.

"Let him be, lad," advised the girl. "We shall know how to attend to his case later on. I would not take a human life but to save my own, or my country."

She stayed the Irish boy with a hand upon his sleeve, and Barney, who was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, put his pistol back into his shirt.

So Yellow Eyes went in peace, slinking along the deck, and dived into the forward scuttle, and they stood there and let him pass. And neither of them knew what they had done that night.

CHAPTER IX

A BAD NIGHT'S WORK

THE clouds which had covered the moon and all the stars, and screened their escape under a mantle of black, now came rolling up out of the northeast more thickly than ever, and with incredible swiftness, hanging so low that they seemed to engulf the whole ship, blotting her out from all the rest of the world. And the wind moaned a mournful croon in the rigging.

The maintopsail was split to ribbons almost before they had it bent, and, wet with the rain which now came down in a solid wall of water, flapped with a deep-toned wail, tugging to get clear of the groaning yard, till finally it was carried away.

Above the roar of the squall which seemed at any moment like to send the ship on her beam's end, Nancy could hear the resolute voice of her countryman shouting orders to the men, who obeyed his commands as if they had been accustomed to do it. She wondered if he was their captain, but of this she could not be sure.

She and Barney clung to the helm, but she felt that their strength was inadequate, and was about to shout for help, when she felt a strong hand close over hers, and heard a voice out of the darkness saying—

"Well done, Devon!"

And then the vaulted dome of night was split from zenith to horizon, and in that vivid instant, when it seemed as if the door of Heaven had been opened wide to show the flaming glories of eternity itself, she saw him for the first time, standing there on the gale-swept deck, a big blond giant of a young man, a weather-beaten, storm-soaked Saxon, with a stubby growth of yellow beard and a great shock of tawny hair matted upon his head, and the blue eyes of a Viking. As the thunder fell upon them with a concussion that made the *Baptiste* tremble in every plank, darkness again, darkness so thick it crushed with its tremendous weight.

She felt the light bark stagger beneath her as it was lifted upon the crest of a mighty wave, and shiver again, and sigh and groan in its extremity as it slanted down into the trough of the boiling sea, rail under water and the decks awash. God's mighty voice spoke again across the world, and a flood of brilliance, brighter than a lifetime of days, deluged them with a celestial radiance.

She saw the boy at her side clinging to the helm with all his strength, his freckled face gone pale as death and glistening with the spume, only the red rag of his tongue, curling out of the corner of his hard-set mouth, making him look like his natural self. Beyond him the round-house covered with débris, the canvas struggling to be free, and the men laying out in the yards, and beyond all a waste of frantic water, mountain high, a seething caldron of waves, their tops torn off by the hurricane and flung about as by a giant madman.

The awful grandeur of it brought a gasp to her lips, a cry more of astonishment and wonder than of fear. The *Baptiste* reeled, and then, before she knew what had happened, she slipped, a strong arm encircled her waist and she was in the arms of the man she did not know, whom she had seen but once, strained against his breast, and he was kissing her and saying in a roar against the fury of the storm: "I love you! I love you!" in a voice that came to her out of the gale as faintly as a baby's whisper.

How long she laid there against his great brawny chest she did not know, nor did she ever know. Hours—weeks—months. It seemed to Nancy as if she had been there, sobbing hysterically in his arms, forever and ever, when finally she pulled herself away from him.

Two of the mariners had come to the wheel, and the Devon man, in that voice that thrilled her whenever he spoke, was giving orders as calmly as if he had been a bargeman on the Thames on a quiet Sunday afternoon.

"Now, boys," he called out—he had her still in the hollow of his arm, his free hand at his mouth—"bring her up a little to the wind. Cut all her lee fore rigging. Cut the main to'mast and mizzen lee rigging. Now lay to windward. Look lively there, you old standers! Cut all your weather fore-rigging."

The men leaped at his bidding, and with this the foremast went by the board, and took with it the main topmast and mizzen topmast. The wreckage cleared the ship with a little quick work and was soon astern.

The *Baptiste* righted herself. Much of the canvas on the main and mizzen had blown itself out of the bolt-ropes. The men at the wheel kept her dead before it until they began to cut away, and then they let her come to a couple of points.

With the coming of the first faint streaks of dawn they made their way into the great cabin, and the Devon man, as Nancy called him to herself, went off to search for a ship's biscuit, and came back empty handed, with a face that was very grave, although he tried to conceal from her the alarm that he felt. The ship was laboring less now, and the fury of the storm abating considerably. The sun came up in an almost cloudless sky, with the bosom of the Caribbean undulating in long, easy swells of turquoise blue.

They dried their clothes by walking on the deck, with Three-legs, who had come up from some retreat in the hold where he had sagaciously stowed himself, barking and whining at their side. But especially did he whine, and growl, too, when they walked forward. Then he would scratch grotesquely with his one forepaw at the forward hatch, uttering sharp, excited yelps.

Barney gave Nancy a sidelong glance full of meaning, but the girl placed her finger against her lips and nodded to him to be silent. The hatch had been battened down, and she judged that Yellow Eyes would be safer for a while where he was than on deck with the men who had learned from Barney how the dumb man had sought to betray her secret to the French Governor.

The ship was a derelict, her masts carried away, with scarce a spar left large enough to rig into a jury mast. Nancy and Barney, with the dog, walked aft through the wreckage with which the decks were strewn, and the girl began to consider the situation in which she found herself. The mission upon which her father and Sidney had sent her was as fresh in her mind as it had been on the night she had quit their lodgings in Lille; and she still hoped with the buoyancy of youth that she would be able, somehow, some way, she did not know how, to get to London in time to give, to those who could use it for the cause, the secret information which she had been charged to impart.

The Devon man and Jim Rimble had gone below. The former now came back to where she and Barney stood, and she saw by the look in his eyes that he was anxious.

"What is it, my friend?" she asked. "I see by your face that you are sorely troubled."

"I may as well tell you," he answered. "For, although I would spare you if I could, God knows 'tis not a thing can be concealed. We are in a bad way. The old tub has strained her seams, and we are half full of water. That is why we ride more easily now. For another thing, there isn't a mouthful of food aboard. Cleaned out, she is—not a speck of grub. And I warrant you we have made good search. We have come to sea in our coffin, I greatly fear me."

"Oh, it can't be as bad as that." Nancy smiled, and touched him lightly on the arm. "I am sure you will find a way out of our difficulties."

"How?" he asked, shortly.

"Why, we can sail back to Tortuga, if the worst comes to the worst," interjected Barney hopefully. "There's plenty of grub there—roast ox, and everything."

"Sail!" he cried. "What with, lad. Can you hold your 'kerchief to catch a breeze? No, I tell you, here we rot. Forgive me," he added quickly, turning to Nancy. "I do not mean to frighten you, but our condition is indeed desperate. And here come the men! I fear I shall have mutiny on my hands. Have you the pistol, lad? It is all the weapon we have."

Barney, with a sigh and a groan, surrendered the pistol which he took from his shirt, and the Devon man put it into his pocket, an act that did not escape the notice of the men, who now came trooping down to the rail of the quarter-deck, Jim Rimble at their head.

The Devon man let his eye rove over them, saying not a word, at first. Then—

"Well, men?"

"A fine mess you have got us into, me and my mates, we're thinking sir," said Rimble, after an awkward pause.

There was a shuffling of uneasy feet and the bobbing of many heads.

"I have got you into?" demanded the Devon man.

"You, and the wench from Devonshire, that is."

"Oh, as to that I take the blame, if blame there be. But did I drag you out of your prison? Did you not come willingly enough, to take the ship at the risk of your neck, if need be?"

"Well, then, as to that, sir, we would have been glad enough to go under in a free fight—but this is different."

"Different? How different? Can a man die more than once. Come, men, have done with complaints and keep your upper lips stiff. We'll get out of this. Do you fall to now and build up a longboat out of the planks of the ship. I put you on a pint of water a day—'tis all we have in the butts, but enough to last for three days. And in three days much may happen."

The men brightened up a bit at this, and some of them moved off as if to begin the work he had set them to. But Rimble, pulling at his forelock, spat into the scuppers and rolled his eyes. Finally he stammered—

"My belly roars for victuals."

There was a laugh at this, in which Nancy joined. But it was a laugh that died away quickly.

"Well, now, as to that, we're all in the same boat, so to speak, Jim Rimble, and you are not a whit more hungry than am I, but I hope I know how to tighten my belt a notch or two. It isn't as if we had been living on the fat of the land for the past God knows how long in d'Ogeron's cursed dungeon. As for that, Jim Rimble, you have ever bragged what angler thou art. Show some of these men how to rig up a line or two, and perhaps we can have a fish for dinner. But whether we do or not, know ye, men, the first one among you who attempts violence—him will I pistol with my own hand. Now get to work!"

The men turned away at this, sullenly enough, some of them, but presently, what with the fishing operations that began, or the interest that work arouses in even the most downcast of men, some of the lighter hearted began to whistle, and in ten minutes Jim Rimble himself, his face all sunshine again, was barelegged on the rail, a pipe between his teeth and the end of a line in his hand, the while he sang between puffs:

"I loved a lass, a fair one!
  As fair as e'er was seen:
She was indeed a rare one,
  Another Sheba's Queen!
But fool as then I was,
  I thought she loved me too!
But now, alas, she has left me.
    Falero, lero, loo!"

Some among them were carpenters, and soon the saw and the hammer were singing a merry tune which all but drowned out Jim Rimble's ditty. Nancy and Barney leaned over the bulwarks at his side.

"What bait do you use Master Rimble?" asked the girl, smiling.

"A bit of a crab's claw, Miss," replied the sailor, pulling at his forelock and giving her boy's breeches and loose canvas shirt a sidelong glance, as if to say that he didn't know rightly whether she deserved that feminine designation or not, but would follow the Captain's example.

The gay apparel in which Mistress Chillingworth had quit Lille, the crimson stockings, the new short coat, brilliant with ribbons, had long since succumbed to hard usage, and she had picked up on shipboard a nondescript outfit, loose, rough cotton, stained and threadbare. The sleeves of her jacket reached but to the elbow. Her limbs were bare to the knee, and her shapely legs and arms were as brown as sun and wind and weather could make them. Her hair was gathered beneath a brimless cap which she had found upon the beach at Tortuga. About her throat was knotted a bit of scarlet silk which set off the rich color of her sunburned face.

"Crab's claw, Master Rimble? Why, 'tis a very proper lure to be sure."

"I wish I had known you had it," cried

Barney. "I warrant you no fish would have been smelling at my supper now."

"Never fear, lad—if it had been any good I'd have gulped it myself," said Rimble, wagging his head solemnly. "I'm hungrier than any fish that ever wiggled a tail. It was a dead crab, blown aboard during the storm. I found it yonder in the scuppers, or rather the three-legged dog did. It would have been good enough for him, but I had other plans for that bit of crab. Now if there's a fish in these parts, why, Miss, I'll have him."

"I'll warrant you will, Master Rimble. I can see with half an eye that you are a fisherman."

Jim Rimble's rugged, weather-beaten face glowed with the honest pride that appreciated genius ever feels, and he had opened his mouth to acknowledge the compliment when there came a tug at the line, and he stiffened as one transfixed. Into his eyes flamed the light of a passion that is almost holy.

Gingerly he began to haul away at the cord, softly, gently, hand over hand. His body trembled with eagerness. Slowly then the expression upon his face changed, apprehension, doubt, fear—conviction.

"I had a bite," he said dolefully. "But he got away."

The line sank down into the water again, and he sat once more dejectedly, the personification of sorrow.

"I think," suggested Nancy hopefully, "that maybe you forgot to bless the bait."

"What, Miss?"

"Bless the bait."

He rolled his eyes at her and wagged his head, but said nothing at this.

"Why, to be, sure you must always anoint the bait," explained Nancy. "Don't you know what the saying is:

"Take gum of life, fine beat, and laid in soak
In oil, well drawn from that which kills the oak."

"Never heard tell on it, Miss," said Jim Rimble. "But then," he added, "it wouldn't do any good anyhow. I ain't got any gum of life, and if I had a barrel of it there ain't any oil aboard but sperm-oil, and that wouldn't kill an oak, would it? No, Miss, there ain't but one way to catch fish, asking your pardon—get something they like and go where they is."

With this he hauled in his line and moved off to try his luck in some more likely place.

That afternoon Jim Rimble worked his way around the ship. He fished from the stern and from the bow, and from the waist too. He tried all the places and found each more discouraging than the other. Above the noise of the carpenters his plaintive voice arose all day:

"In Summer time, to Medley
My Love and I would go;
The boatman there stood ready
My Love and I to row.
For cream there would be call,
For cakes and for prunes too,
But now, alas, she has left me.
Falero, lero, loo!"

Meanwhile the men, half-mad with thirst and hunger, fell at the task of ship-building with an energy that showed how keenly they realized the position they were in. Under so many hands the longboat grew as by magic. The Captain himself drew the rude plans of her, and they shaped her out according to his directions. She was forty feet long. One of the spars that had not carried away was fitted to be her mast, and the sail-makers busied themselves about the sails, the stay-sheet and halyard and all the necessary rigging.

The casks containing their small supply of water had been brought up by the Captain's orders into the round-house, which he then barricaded. At noon a gill of water was doled out to each man, the Captain standing guard over the butts with Barney's pistol in his hand.

There was grumbling, but no man sought to take by force more than his proper share. They went back to their work sullenly, low-spirited, some of them suffering acutely, as their feverish lips and eyes all too plainly showed.

Jim Rimble fished assiduously, successfully evading the duties of ship-building on the plea that he was busily engaged furnishing food for the crew. Contemptuous remarks to the effect that he was as poor a singer as he was an angler failed to disturb the serenity of his soul. At frequent intervals he would burst into song:

"Like doves we would be billing,
And clip and kiss so fast!
Yet she would be unwilling
That I should kiss the last.
They're Judas kisses now!
Since that they proved untrue.
For now, alas, she has left me.
Falero, lero, loo!"

Nancy and Barney worked with the rest, fetching and carrying for the men. And the Captain, as she called him, was worth a dozen, what with the wisdom of his advice, the brawn of his mighty arms, and the encouragement that he gave to them.

The three of them had drawn away from the others for a spell of rest in the shadow of the round-house, or great cabin, when there was a commotion forward, and Jim Rimble's voice bellowing:

"I've got him! I've got him! He's a whale!" And then, as they started down the deck on the run, "Sail ho!"

"Where away?" shouted the Captain.

"Two points off the larboard bow, sir."

"What do you make her out?"

"Can't say yet, sir."

* * *

THE men dropped their work, and rushed pell-mell to the forecastle. Away off to the west, so low down that she could scarcely be seen, they made out the topsails of a ship. But what manner of ship she was none could tell.

The men lined the storm-shattered bulwarks, their eyes alight with eagerness. Jim Rimble's fish, in the excitement, made its escape. He went from group to group, bemoaning his ill luck and describing the size and beauty of the prize which had eluded him at last.

"Now, lads," cried the Captain, "don't stand gaping there as if you'd never seen a to'gallantsail before. Is this the time to idle, with a fine ship coming up and the longboat not yet ready to go over the side?"

Nancy saw a glance full of meaning pass between the men, but its significance she did not fathom then. The men did, however, and back they went, tumbling aft so eagerly that they fairly fell over each other in their haste; and presently the noisy ship-building chorus rose again, the clang of hammer and anvil. Jim Rimble, the great angler, joined his shipmates for the first time that day, and stepped the mast himself, his husky voice rising above the music of tools and timber:

" 'Twas I that paid for all things,
'Twas others drank the wine!
I can not, now, recall things;
Live but a fool, to pine.
'Twas I that beat the bush;
The bird to others flew,
For she, alas, hath left me.
Falero, lero, loo!"

There was no grumbling, no lack of energy now. The men worked like demons, as if their lives depended upon their exertions, as, indeed, they knew very well they did. Before the dark night of the tropics suddenly dropped upon them, they had finished her.

She was rough, but the Captain, who had superintended the work from keel to carlins, was satisfied. Nancy, no mean expert herself, by reason of her long association with ship-builders when she was a child in Devon, inspected it with a criticism that won the admiration of the men. She had wanted to tell the Captain how she approved of his design and the skilful workmanship, but there was a reserve in his manner toward her now that made her avoid him. He did not return again to the incident of the night before, when he had held her in his arms on the storm-swept deck, but the words he had spoken to her, above the roar of the tempest, were ringing still in her soul, and she knew that never would she forget them as long as she might live.

To a Puritan girl, reared as she had been, such words could mean but one thing. He loved her. Therefore, she would be his wife. She had decided that irrevocably when he had first spoken them to her against the fury of the hurricane. As for that, she had resolved it in her mind that she should wed him when first she had heard the deep, vibrant voice of him answering her call in the dungeon of d'Ogeron's castle, before she had seen him, even faintly in the darkness, before she had looked upon his face in that first flood of radiance from on high.

But while her heart was won, and she made no concealment of it to her conscience, she had determined that she herself would not be lightly taken. All the suppressed romanticism of her nature, the part of her, handed down from some ancestor who had played his part upon the stage before the gloom of Puritanism had engulfed so large a part of England, that had not been crushed out by the strictness of her religious training and the simplicity of her life among the followers of the Protector, was awakening under the magic touch of love.

She was alive, for the first time in her life, her blood ran faster through her veins, her soft eyes had taken on a luster they had not known before. She had become a woman in that one great instant when Heaven itself had been rent in twain by God's thunderbolt to show her the glories of Paradise.

Without deliberately becoming a coquette, for there was something in her soul too simple and sincere for that, she had determined to keep this young sea-captain at his distance until she chose, when he had earned the boon, to take him into her heart. She could not now be sure whether he avoided her, or seemed to avoid her, because she had first shown an indifference to him, or whether it began with him.

Doubt as to this first found lodgment in her mind late in the afternoon, but the excitement incident to the sighting of the ship and the hurried completion of the longboat drove what resentment she might have felt away. She was a girl once more, as eager for the rescue now at hand, as she supposed, as Barney himself.

Barney was one broad grin from ear to ear at the prospect of getting something to eat, for he, like Nancy, made no doubt that in a few hours at most they would be picked up. Cherie and Bras-de-Mort, after the manner of newly married folk, had kept much to themselves all day long. During the storm the little Parisienne had remained terrified in the round-house, where her husband had placed her, and although he had himself rendered his share of service in handling the ship during the frightful gale, or hurricane, through which they had passed, he evidently considered himself above shipbuilding, or else felt himself incompetent to join in that labor, for he had spent the day at Cherie's side, as attentive as any courtier.

To be sure, he had busied himself with the repair of the musket which Nancy had brought away from the castle, and which had been broken in the confusion of the taking of the ship, but while this might not have been considered a full and generous participation in the general work, under the circumstances, seeing that his efforts were fruitless, and the musket remained as useless when he had expended his energies upon it as it had been before he began his tinkering, the men good-naturedly winked at what in another, with the exception of Jim Rimble, the fisherman, would have been resented as shirking. At the capstan, abaft the mainmast, he made a little awning to protect her from the sun, and here ensconced her upon a chest as if she had been a queen upon her throne. Here he sat by her side, or sprawled at her feet.

Two lovers, thrown together by the hand of fate and set down, man and wife, on the shattered wreckage of a ship that was like to part them as suddenly as they had been made one! Nancy, knowing how much these two derelicts would find to talk about, the questions they would ask as each probed the history of the other, forebore to intrude upon their privacy.

The excitement over the sighting of the strange sail scarcely disturbed them. They joined the noisy, breathless throng at the rail for a few minutes, and then returned to their bower, arm in arm.

As the sail rose higher and higher above the vast expanse of tumbling sea, the men speculated among themselves as to what she would prove to be. Now and then one of them would leave the busy group gathered around the longboat and take a squint at her as she came up, which she did slowly enough.

Toward evening, just before night settled down around them, and the brilliant tropic stars were lighted in the casements of Heaven, Bras-de-Mort, tearing himself away from his bride for a moment, joined the exhausted men, now laying down their tools, and waving his arm off toward where the last faint beams of the sinking sun had shown the stranger to be, shook his head dubiously.

"We shall miss her, after all, Monsieurs," said he.

"Why, how now, Master Bras-de-Mort?" asked the Captain.

"She's ca'med off, sir," interjected Jim Rimble.

Bras-de-Mort scrunched his shoulders by way of assent.

"And by morning, when it freshens, she'll like as not be off upon another tack, and then, adieu!" he finished.

"Right you are!" cried the Captain. "Men, we must put some oars into her. If the ship can't come to us we must go to her. Fall to, you sea dogs, and turn us out some oars. But first we'll have another pull at the water butts."

He doled out a dish of water to every man, and they drank their scanty portions and eyed the casks from which it came. But the Captain stood guard over them, and cursing their luck they went back to the new task he had laid out for them.

The brilliant equatorial moon gave them all the light they needed, and the heat was less intense now, so that they managed well enough. At the completion of the work he told off the watch, and the rest threw themselves exhausted to the deck, and were soon snoring. Nancy laid down, but although she was tired and realized for the first time how much she had been through during the preceding forty-eight hours, she found it impossible to sleep. Her head pillowed upon the broad back of Three-legs, she lay there gazing upward at the stars — and dreaming, wide-eyed, such dreams as young girls dream.

Not for a long time did she float off into the land of real dreams; but she slept at last, and the dreams continued, and he came to her, down the path through the meadow back home in Devon, the meadow that ran down to the sea, along the road where the sailors passed on their way to the ships, with their bundles on their backs. And he took her by the arm, gently, and said in a whisper—

"Follow me!"

* * *

SO SHE got up quickly, rubbing her eyes then, for they were heavy with sleep, and followed him, down the deck to the waist of the ship, where the men were gathered about the longboat. It was midnight. The sea lay as calm as the air above it, and a great silence that was almost uncanny brooded over them, a silence so deep and solemn and mysterious, that the men seemed afraid to break it, and talked in whispers among themselves.

"Now, lads," said the Captain, "we're down to the last cask of water. There's to be a swig for every soul, and the balance goes with me aft in the boat here, to stand us against the time we shall need it more, if we should miss the Don in the dark."

There was a shuffling of feet and a grumble or two. Then the water was passed out, to each man a dishful, barely enough to wet their dusty palates.

"I could drink," said Jim Rimble huskily, "I could drink a bar'l o' it. Yea, mates, I could drink all the water that there's in this here barkantine down below, if 'twas fresh, mind ye. I could drink, I could drink, right now, if I had the chance, I say, I could drink all the water that there's in the Thames at Lambeth."

"If thou didst work thy tongue less thou wouldst not be so dry, Jim Rimble," interrupted the Captain. "Lay ahold of the boat now, lads, and walk her down. Bear a hand with the ax there, Jim Rimble, and cut away. All together now, lads. Walk her along!"

They eased the longboat to the bulwarks, and cutting a great hole there launched her, so that she slid with scarcely a ripple into the sea. The men armed themselves with capstan bars and axes, there being no other weapons aboard the *Baptiste* save the cannon, and tumbled into the longboat.

Nancy, with the French girl Cherie, and Three-legs, stowed themselves away in the stern with Barney aft, near them, at one of the oars, which he insisted upon manning. The Captain shoved off, and the longboat had blue water between her and the bark, when Nancy started up with a shrill cry:

"Put back! Put back, men," she called. "There's a poor devil in the forecastle."

They looked at her as if they thought she had become suddenly bereft of her wits.

"How now, Nancy?" asked the Captain. "I know of nobody else aboard. We are all here, are we not, men?"

"Aye, all here, sir," called Jim Rimble out of the darkness forward.

The Captain looked at Nancy inquiringly.

It was the first time he had spoken her name, and the sound of it in his deep, vibrant voice made the girl catch her breath, so that she was too startled to answer him, but sat there, gazing into his face. Then she shouted—

"Put back, men, he's in the forward hold, I tell you."

"Who, in God's name?" cried the Captain, starting up.

"The dumb man."

"The dumb man? Art ill, child? I know no dumb man—nor is there one among us."

"Aye, the dumb man, I tell you. The man with the yellow eyes."

"Faith! I forgot all about him," yelled Barney, jumping up in his excitement.

"The man with the yellow eyes," cried the Captain at this, more perplexed than ever. "What means this gibberish? You make my head to swim withal."

"Thou wilt not fail to go back, I know," pleaded Nancy, putting her hand appealingly upon his arm. "The dumb man is in the forward scuttle. I myself saw him hide himself there when he came aboard, I and the boy Barney, here. Is it not so, lad?"

"Aye, we saw him duck into the scuttle plainly enough — curse his soul!" replied Barney.

"And then when the storm broke, the scuttle-hatch was battened down," Nancy went on. "And so he has been in the hold all this day. And what with the frightful heat and lack of water I fear me he hath perished."

"Ay, like enough he hath perished, whoever he may be, but by St. Bride of Douglas! Who was the fellow? I saw him not, nor even dreamed such a one was aboard."

"True, I had forgotten," answered Nancy. "You saw him not. He is the dumb man—the man with the yellow eyes. 'Tis all I know of him, save that 'twas he who escaped from d'Ogeron's castle, where I had him securely bound with cords, and gave the alarm to the buccaneers."

"Split my wizen!" cried out Jim Rimble at hearing this. "Then let him rot there. What, men?"

"How now, Jim Rimble," said the Captain quietly, but with a deeper vibration in his voice. "When did you take command of this craft?"

But there was an answering roar of approval from the men, and it was not approval of what the Captain had said, but of Jim Rimble's verdict, so that Nancy, fearing that they would carry the day, sprang up and appealed to them to go back.

"Faith!" said Barney, breaking in impetuously at this juncture, when the men seemed inclined to listen to the girl. "Much you should concern yourself with this dog of a dumb man, seeing what he hath done to us."

"Why, and what's that, lad?" asked the Captain.

"He kidnaped us, for one thing," replied the Irish lad bitterly.

"Kidnaped thee? Where?"

"Somewhere outside of Lille, in France. 'Twas thus we came here."

A roar from the men, and there was the sound of oars striking the water.

"Nay, hold, I pray you!" There was winning appeal in Nancy's voice. "I feel a pity for the fellow, vile as he is. I wouldst have thee go back and fetch him aboard. I can not bear the thought of leaving him there to die like a trapped rat."

"And he tried to kill her, too!" Barney was full of animosity; besides, the sound of his voice was pleasant in his ears. "Ay," he went on, "he tried to kill her on the old *Baptiste*."

"Then may God have mercy on his soul," said Jim Rimble in a deep rumble, "for there he stays till his bones rot, eh, mates?"

"Ay, Jim Rimble, there he stays, right enough. Thou didst speak truly then—as truly as any fisherman can."

There was a laugh all around at this sally.

"Let him rest where he is, Mademoiselle," whispered Barney.

"Nay, I will save him with God's help," she answered. "Now men, wilt go back for me?"

"Well, Miss," answered Jim Rimble, "we'd do most anything for you that you asked us to do, except this. Here's a man we're devilish well rid of. First he kidnaps you, then he fights you, then he betrays you—and us. If we had him here right now we'd cut his throat and throw him in the pickle, eh, mates?"

"That we would, Jim Rimble!" roared the men heartily. "That we would. In the pickle with the fishes."

The Captain had kept silent, for he was in no mood to waste precious time in the rescue of a fellow so worthless as the dumb man, by all accounts, appeared to be. Now Nancy, seeing that she could expect no aid from him, sprang quickly to the gunwale and poised there.

"Go back, or I shall throw myself into the sea!" said she.

One of the seamen left his place and started toward her in the darkness, but she saw him coming.

"Nay," she said, "come no nearer. If you do I will hurl myself overboard. Wilt go back, men?"

"Ay, we'll go back, Devon," said the Captain, and gave the order.

The men pulled back to the black hulk of the *Baptiste*. Half a dozen then went aboard, Nancy following them, pried off the forward scuttle-hatch, and Pierre, the Frenchman, thrusting his head into the narrow opening, just large enough to admit the body of one man, called out:

"*Hein!* You there with the yellow eyes. Why are you loafing below when honest men are at work?"

But there was no answer.

"Dumb men can't hear, can they?" asked Pierre, when he had called again and again with the same result.

"Ay, they can hear well enough," answered Nancy. "Leastways, this fellow can. He is not dumb from birth, but hath had his tongue cut out."

"A galley-bird, like enough," said Jim Rimble. "Well, what to do now. We can't wait here all night. I think I'm getting ready to feel a breeze now, and if that ship gets away from us"— he wagged his head at Nancy as if to say that further words absolutely failed him—"I'm for shoving off. We've given him a chance. What more could he ask?"

"Let me look for him," replied Nancy, and lowered herself through the hatchway.

If it had been dark on deck, the blackness was impenetrable in the hole in which she now found herself. The water in the hold was not so deep here as she had seen it aft that day, but it was above her waist as she felt her way slowly forward, searching for the man she knew was there somewhere, but whether dead or alive she could not tell.

At last she found him, when she had all but abandoned the hope of doing so. He had crawled upon one of the timbers fastened into one of the carling knees, and must have fainted there from heat and thirst, and was still unconscious, for Nancy could detect no sign of life in him.

She reproached herself for having let that day of storm and stress, and that something new that had come into her life to make her a dreamer, drive him from her memory.

She pushed his great bulk into the water, and towing him back to the hatchway, called up. Presently the men brought a tackle and hauled him out and laid him upon the deck.

Jim Rimble, thereupon, ran off as fast as he could go, and returning to the longboat and stating the case to the Captain, came back in no great time with a horn of water which he poured into the empty, tongueless gullet of the dumb man. This and the night air revived him.

His eyelids fluttered, and presently they opened, and those strange and awful yellow eyes were staring up at them. And so they bore him back into the longboat and laid him down. The men taking their places once more, they shoved off, and the *Baptiste* was left to herself.

No bodings of ill came to haunt the girl. Her mind was at rest; but the simpler nature of the boy was stirred. He came to her, when he gave over his oar after a while to one of the men, and bending down so that none might hear, he said—

"We have done a bad night's work, Mademoiselle."

That was all. But the words found lodgment in her very soul, and she could not rid herself of them.

CHAPTER X

ST. GEORGE FOR ENGLAND

THE men bent to their oars and pulled along in silence, with a long, easy, stroke. The Captain at the helm held the longboat on a course that should fetch her up with the ship if the air did not freshen too soon; for the dead, flat calm had lasted since sundown, and the vessel could not have sailed much beyond the place where they had last seen her topsails in the engulfing darkness.

The men rowed steadily, and what with the mystery of the night and their exhaustion, and the torturing thirst in their throats, were in no mood for talk. They were as still as the dumb man who lay gasping in the bottom of the boat at Nancy's feet, his yellow eyes staring up at the sky.

The first faint ribbons of dawn fluttered above the eastern rim of the sea and the timid stars slipping away, a deeper darkness than that of midnight thickened around them for a while, until, of a sudden, the lordly sun was among them, and it was day. Out of the fleeting mists to starboard emerged the ship, with the sails already unfurling upon her spars.

"Sail ho!" softly called Pierre, the lookout in the bow, but all had seen her.

As they looked there came a ripple across the placid waters. The sails filled now, catching the first faint breath of the morning, and the Spanish Ancient fluttered in the breeze. Her canvas bellied and she was off upon her course.

"I knew she was a Don," whispered Jim Rimble to himself, and lay back upon his oar.

The Captain ordered him forward, then, and a flaw striking them, he hauled the sail up and they went about ship, and, getting the wind of the Spaniard, they bore down upon her on the quarter, and so came upon her out of the vapor that hung above the sea, before she could get under way upon the other tack.

Before the alarm was given, and the Spaniard's crew came tumbling up, the longboat drifted down her side and grated along her chains, and about twenty of the men, with Jim Rimble and Pierre, and Bras-de-Mort, at their head, were in her shrouds in a twinkling, and over her forecastle, upon the deck, where they met the bewildered Dons with their stout staves and axes, laying about with them furiously. A fusillade of shots was poured into them, and some of the English went down, but by now the rest had clambered over the side, and, gaining the deck, came to close quarters with the Dons.

They fought desperately with their capstan bars and pikes, and a cutlass or two that had been dropped by the wounded Spaniards, but the musket fire told upon them, and they were being driven back when Nancy, who had been among the last to leave the longboat, burdened as she was with Three-legs, finally gained the deck. Covered with blood which streamed from their wounds, gasping and panting, the fierce light of battle raging in their feverish eyes, the English retreated step by step.

The Spanish Captain, who had been asleep in his cabin, came up now in all his armor, and taking in the situation, he cried—

"Death to the English dogs!"

He drew his rapier and the sun sparkled and flashed upon it. There surged then into the memory of Nancy the stories of her childhood. Her father and all her kinsmen had fought the Spaniards at home and in the Low Countries, and so there flamed now in her dark blue eyes a light that Algernon Sidney would have loved.

"Ho! men, 'tis sink or swim now, my brave comrades," she suddenly cried out in a loud voice. And, leaning over the side of the ship, cut with an ax the painter which held the longboat at the bow, and set it adrift, and then called out again, "St. George for England!" The English, seeing their boat far astern and knowing that there was now but one thing to do, did it so lustily, and with such fresh energy, that they drove the Spaniards back, and forcing most of them below, begging for quarter, the ship presently struck.

The Captain, the Devon Captain, that is, for so she called him, took the quarterdeck, and mustering enough men to man the ship, sent Pierre to the helm, and gathering way, they went off before a freshening wind, in possession of as fine a West-Indiaman of 170 tons and fourteen guns as would gladden the hearts of any shipwrecked mariners in Christendom.

The men waited but to seize all the weapons they could lay their hands upon, as well muskets and pistols as cutlasses, when they made a rush for the great cabin and the bread-room, and threw themselves like ravenous beasts upon all the food and water they could find, so that they were like to gorge themselves to their death, seeing that they would heed none of the remonstrances of the Captain. They broke open the hold, too, and bringing out some casks, staved in the heads.

"Victuals and drink!" cried Jim Rimble, leaping about the deck in a frenzy of joy and excitement, a gobbet of meat in one hand and a pewter mug of wine in the other, "Victuals and drink!" He rolled his eyes at Nancy. His weather-beaten face, seamed with a thousand wrinkles, was redder than any sun had been able to bake it. "Ah! my lady, victuals and drink are the best things in all the world. Fine! Yet I like not these sweet Spanish wines—would rather have a pottle of good old English ale. Ay, that's a drink for ye!"

"Have a care, Jim Rimble," admonished Nancy. "One should be prudent after a long fast."

But she might as well have talked to the mainmast, for all the effect her advice had. Now that the ship was theirs, and they had food and drink in abundance, the men were not disposed to take orders from anybody, save those that were required for their own safety and the navigation of the ship.

Observing that Cherie and Bras-de-Mort were as gluttonous as any, and that Barney was making up for lost time with a rapacity that threatened to burst him, Nancy turned her attention to them, to such good effect that they, and a few of the men, more prudent than the rest, were finally wise enough to heed her warnings, the soundness of which was apparent in no very great time, when so many of the men were taken ill that had another fret of wind come upon them the ship must have been lost for lack of hands to trim her sails; while the Spaniards might have retaken her but for the precaution that was taken of battening down the hatches upon them.

Nancy ate but a scanty breakfast, and then, returning to the deck, drew the Irish lad to one side, for the question of her own fortunes, and with them those of her friends in England, was still uppermost in her mind, and she wished to talk with the boy about her plans.

"Hark ye, Barney," she said, when they were well alone. "Thou hast been a faithful friend since the night we first met in the market square at Lille. Now, here we are, lad, our lives saved for the present, to be sure, and God be praised for that, but on a course that will never fetch us to England, I fear. What do you counsel, lad?"

"Counsel?"

"Ay—what to do next, lad. Here we are in the Spanish Indies. Well, we can't stay here, can we?"

"Why not?" demanded Barney.

"I have business in London—urgent business, that has been delayed already, I fear, far too long."

"Then in that case I would give it over," answered the Irish lad, his eyes sparkling.

"Give it over? Ah, that I can not do."

"We have a fine ship," protested Barney. "Faith, Mademoiselle, what more could a body want—plenty to eat and to drink, and the whole wide world ahead of us. I want to see something, I do."

"Ah, Barney," she smiled, "thou hast been a very man, indeed, but I fear thou art a child at heart. Life is made up of far more serious things than thou wot of."

"Mutiny, for one thing!"

* * *

NANCY wheeled at the sound of that voice—his voice—and he was standing there, looking at her quizzically, his blue eyes smiling, yet troubled, too.

"Mutiny?" she demanded.

"Ay, mutiny! The men are rapidly getting out of hand. To hear them talk, one would never imagine that they were lately in a dungeon cell, with a rope around their necks, and the hulks staring them in the face. They will have this and they must have that. They can't make up their minds as to anything, and they won't let anybody else do it for them—the beggars!"

"I thought you were the Captain," she answered. "They have obeyed you hitherto."

"When it suited them, and then only because they are lost without me. As good sea dogs they are as ever sailed out of Plymouth, but there isn't a navigator among them. I have them there!"

"Thou shouldst have no trouble in coming to terms then, methinks."

"Ay, if they didst but know it. They are such fools, they have not learned yet that not a man among them can take an observation or lay off a course."

"Where would you take them, sir?"

"To England."

"To England!" Surprise and delight mingled in the look that Nancy gave him then. Her eyes danced with joy. "'Tis where I, too, would go."

"By St. Bride of Douglas! I can not bend them to my will, what with the Spanish crew between decks that we must have an eye to. They will have naught of England, nor can I prevail upon them to make for Port Royal, where I could find a ship for home."

"Will not go?"

"Nay. Nor do I blame them, seeing that their lives and liberty are at stake."

"Their lives and liberty? But Port Royal is an English city, and Jamaica an English colony, thanks to Cromwell, and whatever England takes she never relinquishes. I had not heard we had lost this place."

"Ay, 'tis English, well enough," he smiled, "but the men would rather see the devil himself just now than Governor Modyford." He made a motion as if to place a noose about his neck. "A dozen of them would be hanged," he finished shortly, "and another dozen sold as indentured servants for the debt they have taken leg bail for."

"And thyself, sir?" she asked, and then lowered her eyes, for she had not meant the question as he had taken it.

"I am on His Majesty's service," he answered, his face flushing.

"Forgive me. I did not intend——"

"Nay, I am as ragged and unkempt as these other tatterdemalions. Your thought but does justice to your intelligence."

"On His Majesty's service?" She looked at him with eyes full of innocent wonder. "A queer place for the king to have business."

"Such a series of mishaps have brought me thither I could not tell you of them in a month," he blurted out at this, wagging his great Saxon head like an angry bull, petulantly, childishly.

"Mishaps!"

"Ay, I should be in Paris this blessed instant, and here I am, a derelict, adrift with a gang of cut-throats—and a very charming young woman—" this with a glance that made her lower her eyes again—"and bound I know not whither."

"You have had adventures, too, sir," she smiled. "I love adventures."

He laughed, grimly enough.

"You may call them such," he said. "My ship for France was wrecked in the Channel, and I was picked up by one of the fishing fleet for Newfoundland. Nor could I induce them, for what store of gold I had by me, to put back. Head winds and storm drove us far out of our course, and running short of provisions, the sloop I was aboard tried for the colony in Virginia, but being driven farther south, we finally made a landfall in the Summer Isles, where I took passage on a vessel for Port Royal.

"But we fell in with the Dons, and I was taken to Domingo, but escaped, and finding my way with a party of cattle-hunters, to Tortuga, reached there just as d'Ogeron was cleaning up the island of all Englishmen, that he might make a French colony of the place, and so was clapped into his bloody fort along with the rest of these old standers. And there we rotted until you came to show us the way out.

"Ods-fish! Fate hath a pranky way with her, sometimes. So here I am, worse off than ever, and time flies, and His Majesty's business waits."

"Thou art not the only one who—" began Nancy, then bit her tongue and looked off, silent now, at the rippling waters of the Caribbean. "An affair of state?" she asked archly.

"Ay," he nodded, "an affair of state!"

The thought of it seemed to make him grave again, for the smile faded from his eyes.

"His Majesty's business, methinks, rests more seriously upon his courtiers than upon himself. Thou shouldst look now after thy own interests."

"He trusted me," replied the Devon man simply. "He is the King."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Nay!" he cried. "'Tis no ordinary matter. His Majesty's crown, ay, his very life, may be depending even now upon me in these days of cursed Puritan conspiracies. Paris is a hotbed of treason, such as thou couldst not even dream of."

"Treason?" she repeated, her eyes full of innocence again.

"Ay, black treason. Sidney is there, the arch conspirator, and Colonel Chillingworth, a very dog for plots. 'Twas on that business I was sent to Paris, for that they are plotting there is well known to His Majesty's ministers, and I was charged to lure them back to England, that they might all be caught in one net and sent to the block. But I speak too freely to a stranger, though that thou art a Devon maid did make me loosen my tongue."

Nancy leaned over the rail, her face turned from him lest he see in it something of the deep concern his words had caused her.

"We have been thrown together strangely," he continued, after a pause, taking her small hand in his. "And yet, such has been the turmoil in our lives since we have met I have not yet learned your name, save that the Irish lad calls thee Nancy—a pretty name, and one I love."

She drew away from him, blushes staining her cheeks, but he held her hand, and she let him keep it.

"I am of the Devonshire Stillingfleets, Godfrey Stillingfleet, of His Majesty's Navy, at your service," he went on.

"The name is not new to me, sir," replied Nancy. "I know it well as an honorable name in my country, and one that has long been associated with our exploits on the sea."

"My grandfather sailed with Hawkins, and was with Drake at Nombre de Dios. I have used the sea all my life. And you—Nancy? The boy said that you had been kidnaped in France. How came a gentlewoman here, and what, may I ask, is your name?"

"You speak of me as a gentlewoman," she answered, averting her eyes once more, "yet you found me in company to make you think naught but ill of me."

"Nay," he answered, taking her hand again. "You wear your credentials upon your face and in your eyes, which do not lie."

Whereupon, for some strange reason, Nancy found she could not look at him, and so gazed off to sea with eyes that were blurred.

"My name—I can not tell you, sir," she answered after a pause, when he had taken her unresisting hand again. "Call me 'Nancy.' 'Tis all I can give you now, and I beg of you do not press me further."

He bowed.

"And now," she went on briskly, stopping to pull the ears of Three-legs who came up and threw himself at her feet, "what say the men? They will not listen to your desires to return to England. Peradventure they have something to suggest."

"Ay, that they have," he answered, bringing his fist down upon the rail. "They propose to go where they list to seek purchase."

"Purchase!"

"They needs must have more gold, and so would gain further booty from the Spaniards in these seas."

"What!" she cried. "Would they then turn pirate?"

"Turn pirate," says he at this, looking at her wonderingly. "My God, Madame, they *are* pirates!"

CHAPTER XI

PIECES OF EIGHT

YOUNG BARNEY McGIGGEN, his red rag of a tongue curling from the corners of his delighted mouth, and his countless freckles sparkling in the tropical sunlight like so many specks of gold, had leaned over the rail close by them, absorbed apparently in a school of flying-fish, disporting themselves in the waves. But his ears had drunk in all that had been said.

"Faith, then, Mademoiselle!" he cried, his freckles vanishing for an instant as his grin deepened. "If we are pirates, praise God, we have lost the best one among us, for never did I see a man more fitted for the trade than Yellow Eyes."

"Lost him?" demanded Nancy wonderingly. "What mean you, lad?"

"Nothing, save that we shall never see him again. He's gone!"

"Gone?"

"Faith, and he was after being in the longboat when you cut her adrift."

"And good riddance, too, I say, if this be true," interrupted Captain Stillingfleet.

" 'Tis true enough," moaned Nancy. "I recall it all. I was the last one over the side just now when we took the ship. The dumb man was lying there in the bottom of the longboat, too weak to move, unable to cry out, and in the excitement of the fight I gave him not a thought." Tears sprang to her eyes. "He will die, I know, of hunger and thirst, for he was all but dead when I hauled him out of the hold of the *Baptiste*."

She ran to the stern and scanned the sea, then climbed into the shrouds that she might have a wider view. Seeing all around her naught save the boundless waste of water, she called aloft to the lookout, but the sailor replied that no sign of the longboat could he see.

"We must go back, Captain Stillingfleet," said she, coming down from the rigging and joining him upon the quarterdeck. "I can not abandon the wretch to so horrible a fate."

"Ods-fish! what is it to you?" he answered. "The fellow hath been but a menace to you since first he kidnaped you in France and brought you thither. We are all well rid of him. Never, I think, did I see so repulsive a human. He had the eye of a devil if ever I saw one."

"What you say may be true, and I have no cause to feel pity for him, but he is one of God's creatures and I can not abide the thought of leaving him alone in all this desert with neither food nor drink."

"There was some water left in the cask," replied Captain Stillingfleet indifferently, "enough, mayhap, to last him a day or two. But I do believe he is dead by now. In all events it would be a hopeless task to search for him, for we have taken no observation since we seized the ship, and know not where we are, nor whence we came, nor how the currents set in these parts, nor anything soever, save that we have sailed before the wind. To look for him would be a waste of time."

"But you will bring the ship about and try," she pleaded, laying her hand upon his arm.

"I could not, if I would. The men, with half of them lying in the scuppers from their gluttony, would refuse me even if they were able to, and I would but force an issue that I would defer until a more favorable time. So you must give it over."

"Faith, he'll turn up again, Mademoiselle," said Barney, wagging his head knowingly. "That fellow was never born to die—he was born to get killed."

Whereupon Captain Stillingfleet, with a great laugh, clapped him so heartily upon the back that Barney was lifted from his feet and went off rubbing his shoulder.

"And now," added the Devon man to Nancy, "I have sent for the Spanish Captain, and if you like you may remain here by me and speak with him."

The Spaniard emerged now from his cabin where he had retired when the ship had struck, and with him was a girl about her own age who was the most beautiful woman, Nancy thought, that she had ever seen, a dark, tigress-eyed creature, with hair like the mantle of midnight, and the pale olive complexion of her race.

"My apologies to you, Señor, for the inconveniences we have put you to," smiled Stillingfleet with the easy grace of a courtier; but, although he addressed himself to the Spanish captain, Nancy observed that he had eyes only for the daughter, and a feeling surged within her bosom such as she had never known before.

"Nay, Captain," the Spaniard answered with a bow, " 'tis the fortune of war and I can not complain. I would have the honor of presenting you to my daughter, did I but know your names."

"Captain Stillingfleet, of his Majesty's Royal Navy—at your service, Señor."

The Spaniard looked now at Nancy, meaningly, at her bare limbs, her coarse shirt and breeches, at her mop of hair crowded into her cap, and there was a question in his eyes, although he did not speak. His daughter, surveying her from unkempt crown to bare toes, her own lips and nostrils curling into a contemptuous smile, turned her back, while the hot blood mounted to the English girl's cheeks.

"My name," said Nancy, quivering at the insult that was more full of meaning than any mere words might have expressed, "can matter little to you. Therefore I forbear to mention it."

The Spaniard flushed, and would have spoken had not Captain Stillingfleet interposed.

"Nay," says he, looking at his countrywoman, "one should be given courtesy when one's ship hath been seized from under him." Whereat Nancy bit her lip in vexation at the position in which she found herself, and, repenting as quickly as she had offended, she had an apology on her tongue when the Spanish girl, with a languishing glance at Captain Stillingfleet, shrugged her shoulders with a gesture more eloquent than language.

" 'One's ship' indeed," flared up Nancy at this, stung again to the quick. "Since when have Spaniards sailed in English ships and called them theirs?"

"English ships!" exclaimed Captain Stillingfleet.

"Ay, this is an English ship."

"That can not be."

"Is it not so, Señor Captain?" she demanded, wheeling upon him. "Then how came you by it? What did you with the English crew who manned her? Peradventure they are starving their lives out in the galleys, or rotting in the dungeon beneath the sea at San Juan d'Ulloa, where that brave Plymouth man, John Hawkins, did have a taste of your treachery as every one in Devon knows. And you Captain Stillingfleet prate of seizing a ship! We have but taken for England what is rightfully England's."

"Not so fast, Mistress Nancy," broke in the Devon man at this, while some of the mariners lurched down to the rail of the quarterdeck at hearing the girl's voice rise with excitement. "It can not be an English ship—'tis not rigged as one."

"English she is, I tell you," she cried. "I have seen too many of them laid down not to know. Jim Rimble!" she called, and Jim the angler stepped out of the little knot of men gathered at the rail. "Say truly, Jim Rimble, whether this be an English ship or no."

Jim Rimble pulled his forelock, and rolling his eyes at her said—

"Ay, Miss, 'tis an English ship."

"What did I tell you?" cried the girl triumphantly. "I knew her for an English ship the minute I set my eyes upon her."

"English she be, Miss, from main to keel," confirmed Jim Rimble again, putting an almost incredible amount of deep-toned conviction into his husky voice, "and built by the Petts at Woolwich—or I'll kiss a pig. Her rigging's Spanish and her tackling, too, and her boulspret are new, but her hull's British. The *Madre de Dios,* they call her now, Miss, but she's the old *Snapdragon,* or I will kiss a——"

"How, now, Señor Captain," says Nancy with a sparkle in her eyes, "we have but taken what is our own here."

"Hurrah!" shouted the men. "That's the talk, Devon."

The Spanish girl's lips curved again ever so delicately and disdainfully, and Nancy felt herself grow feverish once more.

"If this be a lawful prize of war, methinks the cargo, too, is fair booty. Let's have a look at her papers, men."

THE sailors gave a hearty British cheer, and jumped and capered about the deck with glee, and exchanged meaning glances among themselves, as if to say that things were going to suit them very well indeed, and just as they had planned they should. Captain Stillingfleet looked thunder-clouds, but the Spanish captain merely smiled, with no trace of annoyance upon his patrician face.

"Nevertheless, and you take the ship, save that you cast her away, it will be restored to me in good time," said he, "under the law, as you shall find out."

"There is no law below the tropic, nor has been since Elizabeth's time," replied Nancy. "Nor is there any law that says that Englishmen may not take back an English ship wherever they find it."

"England and Spain are now at peace," said Captain Stillingfleet, and the Señor speaks truly.

And then, in an evil moment, he looked at the Spanish girl again, and she smiling back at him in all her loveliness, the frown vanished from his face. He smiled back at her and thus settled his fate.

For a high resolve had been running in Nancy's mind, no less a purpose than to save her friends and kinsmen, hiding in France until the Stuarts might be overthrown again, from the treachery of this cavalier royalist, a resolve to keep him from going back to England, at all costs, at whatever sacrifice, until time should frustrate his schemes. And then that smile! It decided her.

She would hold the ship by whatever pretext she could. To do this, she knew, she would need the aid of the Englishmen she had rescued from Tortuga; and to obtain that she would have to fall in with their plans. Since they were pirates, as Captain Stillingfleet had said, she must, and would, turn pirate with them.

"Let's have a peek at the papers and see what sort of a prize we have here," roared the men, and went tumbling aft, with Nancy at their heels.

They broke open the supercargo's cabin, and getting out the ship's papers spread them upon the table in the great cabin and pored over them with exclamations of delight, Nancy spelling out the items amid a chorus of cheers and yells.

"Men," said she finally, "we have a prize here that brings us riches. Here's the list:

"Hides, 1,900; 100 chests of cochineal; 24 coffers of wedges of silver; 8,400 Castilian reals; 10 coffers of the King of Spain's treasure; 240 hundred-weight of dyestuffs; 780 pigs of lead."

"And what, Miss, is all that worth, think you?" demanded Jim Rimble.

"Not less than 300,000 crowns," answered the girl after a pause.

The men looked at one another at this in silence. Then the one among them who was called Trueheart Jackson, a Sussex man, taking a long breath, "Well, mates," says he, "we're rich now, I'm thinking, and can go back home to old England and live like gentlemen for the rest of our days."

"Hurrah!" shouted the men, mad with delight.

"And hang for it," said Nancy, looking first one and then another of them in the eye. The shot went home. Their faces fell, that is to say the faces of those who could not go home, because of their crimes and rogueries, and were now reminded of them.

"Nay, but with gold we can buy pardons," cried Trueheart Jackson.

"That's so! That's so!" chorused the men, happy as children once more. "We can buy pardons."

"I can't buy a pardon in England for what I done," bemoaned Jim Rimble.

"Why, what did you do, Jim Rimble?" asked Nancy. "Nay, forgive me, 'twas hastily spoken. I meant it not."

"I stoled a sheep," replied Jim Rimble, wagging his head and rolling his eyes at her. "Thirty-eight year ago it were, come next Mich'elmas, nor have I seen a glimpse o' bonny England from that there day to this, and, God help me, I'll risk my neck and go."

"Buy pardons!" The girl put warning, alarm, a sneer into her voice, for she was frightened at the turn events had taken, and the disposition the men showed to go back home. "They'll strip you of your gold — and when that's gone, Tyburn! There's no justice now for any man, in England."

"The maid is right!" roared Jim Rimble. "There is no justice now in England."

This set the men nodding and bobbing their heads again.

"And would you be content with such poor spoils, men," the girl went on, "when another year, ay, another six months, or even a month, and you might return like gentlemen indeed, with ten times the treasure we have here?"

"The maid is right! The maid speaks wisdom," bellowed Jim Rimble. "Ten times the treasure, men!"

There was another outburst of cheering.

"Nor will we go until all may go in safety—until we have riches enough to make the venture worth the risk! What, men?" cried the girl.

"Ay, ay!" shouted the men.

Nancy glanced up, and there stood Captain Stillingfleet by the cabin door, a look in his eyes that was half anger, half amusement.

"And how will you navigate the ship, my hearties?" he demanded. The noisy demonstration ceased, and the men fell to shuffling their feet and looking at one another in deep perplexity. "For know ye withal, men, I will have no part in this piracy, nor will I aid you in any way. To this decision will I adhere whatever betides. Go on with thy madness as thou wilt. I wash my hands of ye."

The men's faces fell prodigiously at this, but Nancy said, looking the Devon man very frankly in the face:

"We have a pilot among us, sir, and can do without you."

"Ay," he replied, "the Spaniard. But hark ye, men, an ye put one of these Dons at your helm and he will assuredly take ye into some Spanish city, nor will ye know better until it is too late and the guns of the fort are on you."

"Nay," interrupted Nancy, "I had no thought of the Spaniard."

"Who, then?"

"Myself!"

"You?"

"I know the use of charts and globes, the application of Gunter's scale and logarithms," she answered him, smiling. "I can take an observation as well as you. Nor am I the only one, for there is Pierre, the Frenchman, who hath sailed twice to the Eastern Indies by the Portuguese route, and hath made many voyages in these very seas. He will be our pilot. So, which is it to be, men—England and Newgate, or the Spanish Main and riches?"

Such a volley of roars and shouts and yells of delight ascended at this brave speech, which fired their imaginations while it set at rest their doubts, that the whole ship throbbed with it, and Barney, aflame with excitement, his face one great expanse of joyous mouth, leaped upon the cabin table, and tearing off his cap, proposed three cheers. They were given with a lusty will.

"Now, men!" cried Nancy. "I set you free from d'Ogeron's castle——"

"Ay, that you did," they chorused back with a great British bellow.

"Follow me, and we will seek purchase. But know ye, withal, I am the Captain here and my orders will be obeyed in all things. What say you, men? If there be among you one who will not abide by this, now is his time to speak and step forward that we may know just how we stand." Not a man budged, as she looked each in turn full in the eye. "It is agreed? Then I will draw the papers up, and all shall set their names down upon it, with the shares each shall have according to his rank and just deserts."

She seized a quill and a sheet, and wrote the agreement, according as she had seen them made upon the papers of some ship setting forth from Plymouth on a voyage of adventure, while all the men, save those on watch, and the sick, groaning from their indiscretions, in the scuppers, stood around and watched her eagerly, and when it was finished she read it off:

> "The captain (that is to say, myself) hath 10 shares.
> The lieutenant (that is to say, Bras-de-Mort) hath 8 shares.
> The master (that is to say, Jim Rimble) hath 7 shares.
> The mate hath 6 shares.
> The gunner hath 6 shares.
> The boatswain hath 6 shares.
> The carpenter hath 6 shares.
> The gunner's mate hath 5 shares.
> The quartermaster hath 4 shares.
> The cooper hath 4 shares.
> The cook hath 4 shares.
> The steward hath 4 shares.
> The coxswain hath 2 shares.
> The corporal hath 2 shares.
> The foremast man hath 1 share, to each."

She paused.

"Shall I put you down for a share, Captain Stillingfleet?" she asked, turning upon him suddenly.

"Nay," said he, shaking his head. "I will have naught of it."

"I will make you Chief Captain by Land, at 8 shares."

"Thou art embarked upon a course of folly, I tell you," he replied, and shook his head again.

The men crowded about the paper now, and put their names upon it, most of them with a mark, and all of them with much labor and many twists of the tongue, as if they had been writing with that organ instead of a quill.

"I regret your decision, Captain Stillingfleet," said Nancy to him again while the men were busy, flashing at him one of her most winning smiles in which were blended, with an incongruity that was wholly feminine, raillery and scorn—and admiration. "I would have you for my mate, an' you were willing."

Such a look lay in his eyes then that her cheeks crimsoned under her tan, as he said, speaking very slowly and softly, his voice full of that deep tone which seemed to touch some hidden chord in the very depths of her soul:

"I would be blithe to be your mate—and by the living God, that I shall be in my own good time." She lowered her eyes. "As for embarking in this mad piracy, I wash my hands of it, but I will speak more at large with you upon that subject later, and, mayhap, I shall drag you back from the pit into which you are rushing headlong."

"My thanks, sir, for your concern," she answered, regaining her composure and nodding to him lightly. "And now, men, you will muster before the mast and be told off in your proper watches."

With a parting cheer they vanished, slapping each other upon the back, as happy as schoolboys. Nancy would have followed them, but Captain Stillingfleet detaining her with a significant glance, she remained behind for a moment to speak with him.

"Look ye, young woman," said he when they were alone, leaning across the cabin table and compelling her eyes to his own, "it is my duty to warn you that you are putting your head in a noose."

She shrugged her shoulders and turned to go. He stepped between her and the door.

"Listen to me, you must and shall," he continued.

" 'Must' and 'shall' are words I like not, Captain Stillingfleet," she replied. "I have made my decision and nothing shall shake me in that determination. As for piracy, as you call it, for more than a hundred years we English have fought the Spaniards below the tropic, whether our countries were at war in Europe or no. What won honors and glory for that brave knight Sir Francis Drake hath no terrors for me."

"Nay, child," he answered, "but Charles rules at Whitehall now, and times have changed."

"And will change again."

"By St. Bride! You talk like a Puritan. I say times have changed. I know that Governor Modyford at Jamaica hath orders to put down privateering against the Spaniards in the Indies, for I have seen those orders with my own eyes, in London, before they were sent here to him."

"Then I will carry on a war against the Spaniards on my own account," said she at this, bristling up. "With thirty English at my command——"

"Moreover," he interrupted, "this Spanish Captain from whom we have taken this ship——"

"An English ship," she reminded him.

"Ay, an English ship, true enough."

"Although thou weren't enough of a seaman to discover the fact for yourself."

He bit his lip, then went on:

"An English ship — placed at the Captain's disposal by King Charles himself. For this prisoner of ours—I should say yours—as he hath told me, is the Don Luis de Espinosa who hath long been his Majesty's confidential agent in Spain, who shared his exile in France and Holland, and who hath now concluded his business in New Spain, where he hath had large interests and honors under the Spanish crown, and is now on his way to England to settle down as an English gentleman on certain estates in Devonshire that have been bestowed upon him by His Majesty, none others, indeed, than those belonging to the rebel Chillingworth, of whom I spoke to you not long since."

"Prithee, and what is this to me?" asked Nancy with a drawl in her voice, a vast indifference, as if the blow had not told home.

"And so," added Captain Stillingfleet, "by going home to England we would have served all our interests and pleased the king to boot."

"Would we have served the interests of the men? You yourself did tell me that half of them would hang on Tyburn did they go back and show their noses in England. Nay, I will not play them false, nor deceive them in any way soever. My mind is made up, Captain Stillingfleet. My word hath been passed to my countrymen here, and I will abide with them, and go away upon our own lay until we have found riches to buy our pardons beyond a doubt."

He shook his head at her, at this, as if at a loss to make her out.

"Why, ods-fish!" said he, pounding the table with his fist. "But a few hours ago you were hot for going back to England."

"I have but availed myself of a woman's inalienable prerogative," she smiled.

"A what?" he cried, looking at her in perplexity.

"The right to change my mind. I am now killing two birds with one stone, where I had thought there was but one," she added, thinking of her father's estates, her own girlhood home, that she could remember but dimly, but loved, and now so strangely had an opportunity to save, temporarily at least, from the alien usurper to whom they had been awarded by the king. "Two birds, Captain Stillingfleet," she finished seriously, and turned to leave him just as the Spanish girl came into the cabin, looking very lovely in a gown of black and red.

She looked at Nancy without seeing her, but in her languid eyes were smiles for the English Captain, smiles that Nancy knew meant treachery and deceit, so that she pressed her teeth into her lip at the sight of them, but which he, poor fool, saw only as the smiles of a woman for a man. So he smiled back at her.

Whereat Nancy, with the majesty of a queen, for all her sailor's breeches and ragged shirt, made an imperious exit, yet lingered long enough to call back over her shoulder—

"I began with an ambition to kill one bird, Captain Stillingfleet, but found there were two—and have now discovered a third."

Which speech mystified the poor fellow more than ever.

CHAPTER XII

THE PIRATES' ISLAND

THAT noon Nancy and Pierre had a very good observation, and finding themselves in the lat. of 18°41″ N., and longitude 75°18″ W., the girl called a council of the men before the mast and gave each among them a chance to express his desires. The sick men had recovered from the effects of their gluttony, and having fixed their names to the agreement, and been allotted their share of the spoils they had already taken, were as eager as the rest to seek purchase.

The question of what to do with the Spaniards under the hatches was uppermost in Nancy's mind, and speaking of the matter to the men, all agreed to her proposal that they should be set ashore where they could find food and water and thus sustain themselves.

"So, lads," said Nancy, "since we are all of a mind on this point, our first dispute, what say you to putting these Dons ashore on the main of Cuba, from which, as the chart shows, we are not far distant?"

"Well, Miss, I mean Captain, asking your pardon," said Jim Rimble at this, rolling his eyes at her so earnestly that she had to bite her lips to keep from smiling in his rugged face, "but what's the use of getting a hornet's nest around our ears, as you might say, when there ain't exactly any need of it?"

"Why, what mean you by getting a hornet's nest around our ears, Jim Rimble?" demanded Nancy, glancing from him to Pierre, whose eyes were snapping and blinking away at a furious rate through the bushy hedge of whiskers that he seemed to be hiding behind.

"*Sacré! Mademoiselle,*" interjected the Frenchman, "Monsieur Jean Rumble he——"

"Jim Rimble, you pollyvooer," roared the Master; "not Jean Rumble."

"Jean Rumble, then, Monsieur, if you will have it that way," replied Pierre, shrugging his shoulders, while Jim Rimble gritted his teeth. "He is right, no? The fact that we are cruising in these waters will come to the ears of the Spaniards quickly enough as it is."

"That it will," bellowed Jim Rimble, "that it will, or I will kiss a pig."

"If we put these Dons on the Main, why, and they have legs, haven't they?" demanded Trueheart Jackson. "Then won't they just naturally walk off?"

"Well, and what if they do?" replied Nancy. "We shall be well rid of them."

"Ay, but suppose they get to one of their settlements," broke in Jim Rimble, wagging his head at a rate that threatened to send it any minute rolling into the scuppers, "and give the alarm? We would be undone, I'm thinking."

"Then what is your plan, Jim Rimble?"

"An island, Miss, I mean Captain, asking your pardon. A small island, say we, eh, mates?"

The men grinned their approval of this sage advice, and Nancy, seeing the wisdom of it, said:

"Very well, men, an' as you are familiar in these parts, no doubt you have such a snug island in mind."

"Well, Miss, Captain, I mean, asking your pardon," replied Jim Rimble, "and that we have, to be sure—or I will kiss a pig. Me and my mates have talked this over, and we think as how Cow Island would just about fit the bill."

"Cow Island?"

"Ay, 'tis but a short league off the southwest horn of the main of Hispaniola, and snug enough, too, and we can get wood and water there—and then!"

He rolled his eyes at her and at the men in a most grotesque but significant manner, so that they burst into a roar of cheers.

"Cow Island it is then," said Nancy, and gave her orders to Pierre, so that, coming about, they stood away S. E. by E.

All the night following and the next day, bearing away more to the East, they held this course in varying winds, and finally fell with the island, but rounding the point into the harbor, a shot came across her bow, and rushing on deck Nancy beheld at anchor in the cove seven ships, of which the largest was a man-o'-war, a frigate of thirty-four guns. They were under the lea of the island. The sails hung lifeless. It was impossible to go about upon the other tack. The men aboard the frigate were springing to quarters when the girl, her eyes aflame with excitement called out to her men who had tumbled below to the gun-deck:

"Avast there, men, she's English!"

She hauled down the Spanish ancient now and ran up the British ensign with her own hands. There was scarcely wind enough to spread her folds, but the men aboard the frigate and the other ships, too, recognized the colors, and a great cheer came across the waters to her. So they came to, and drifting into the cove, came to an anchor in eight fathoms.

The men were not long in making out now that the strangers they had come upon so suddenly were friends of their own kidney, so that Nancy, fearful for the treasure in the hold, and the danger they were in of one of the Spaniards disclosing the secret, decided to put a bold face upon the matter. She ordered out the captain's gig.

"But hark ye, men," said she, speaking in a low tone, for they were now under the scrutiny of the other ships, "say no word to these strangers of the riches we have between decks here, for though they be our countrymen, mayhap they would rob us with as easy a mind as though we were the Viceroy himself. Nor say any word soever of the Spaniards we have here, lest we lose at last what we have already gained at so much pains."

"The maid speaks truly," cried Jim Rimble in half a roar, as if he tried to whisper, and there was a nodding of heads among the men, so that Nancy saw that they could be relied upon.

"And now, men," she went on, "do you remove the Spanish Captain and his daughter from their cabin and put them in the hold with their countrymen. And now, Captain Stillingfleet," said she very coolly, turning upon him suddenly, "since he who is not with us is against us you will oblige me by stepping below—and as quickly as may be."

"And what if I refuse?" he asked in that deep, vibrant voice of his, his Saxon eyes smiling at her quizzically.

"Why, then sir," says she, "that ship yonder is an English ship of war, an' I make no mistake."

"Thou art quite right," says he. "It is an English frigate, for 'tis H. M. S. *Oxford*, as I should know well enough, for I have served upon her. So you see you have come to the end of your rope all ready, as I knew thou wouldst, though much sooner, I confess, than I had expected."

"Nay, Master Stillingfleet," she answered him very quietly, "thou art a poor prophet, for I have just begun, and you will go below, and quietly, and make no alarm or I will shoot thee dead upon the deck, for that thou shalt not betray me to this ship of war I am firmly resolved."

She suddenly pulled a cocked pistol from her bosom, and pointed it at his head.

"Fie, Mistress Nancy," says he, gazing at her like a great overgrown schoolboy, "you would not shoot, and that I know very well—so have done with this playing."

"Give me no cause to prove my determination to you, I pray you sir," she replied as quietly as before, her face suddenly going pale beneath her tan. "Were my own life only at stake that I truly would not, but there are things in this business you do not comprehend, and for those things I would kill you were it necessary. Go below, sir, I beg of you."

"By St. Bride! That I will never do," he replied, and took a step toward her, looking into the barrel of her pistol, and, beyond that, into the depths of her blue eyes.

But Bras-de-Mort slipping up upon him at this—they were on the side of the great cabin away from the ships—thrust the muzzle of a musket into his face, with so unmistakable a look in his snapping black eyes that, giving one glance about the deck, and seeing no friendly countenance there, Stillingfleet presently turned upon his heel and went below, and the hatches were all battened down and a guard set.

The gig being now at the ladder in the waist, Captain Nancy went into her, with Jim Rimble, and Bras-de-Mort, Trueheart Jackson and the boy Barney at the oars, and they pulled over to the frigate.

What was their astonishment then, as they went over the side and were greeted by one who seemed to be in command, and his subordinates who were gathered at the rail, to see seated upon a coil of rope Yellow Eyes, the tongueless man, his sinister orbs like molten gold glaring at them with the ferocity of a wild beast, his hairless head glistening in the brilliant tropical sun like some fleshless skull.

"Faith! Mademoiselle," cried Barney, " 'tis that devil again, the man with the yellow eyes."

But she had seen him, too, and stood there silent, with parted lips, nor heeded the greeting of a tall, handsome but slightly over-stout man of thirty or thereabouts, with a heavy but far from unpleasing Welsh face and a look of great power and determination in his commanding eyes and strong mouth and chin.

Trueheart Jackson nudged her slyly.

" 'Tis Henry Morgan," he whispered. "Hast heard of him? The greatest among us in these seas I warrant you, ay, the greatest since Drake. I was with him at Porto Bello."

NANCY turned to him now and took his hand at his greeting and something that she saw in his eyes made her suddenly conscious of her boy's clothes, so that she stammered and blushed before him. He, as if to cover her embarrassment, presented her then to Captain Edward Collier, of His Majesty's navy, who, Nancy presently understood, was in command of the *Oxford*. But why he should be there, among these men so plainly of another and more lawless trade, she could by no means discover.

Captain Morgan greeted Jackson and Jim Rimble familiarly as old friends, and while she spoke with Captain Collier, the latter drawing the Welshman aside whispered something to him, whereat he straightened up and stared sharply at the girl, admiration deepening in his eyes.

"We are well met, Madame," says he, taking off his hat and giving her a great bow. "We touched at Tortuga on our way thither, to pick up a few of the French there who occasionally join with us in our enterprises, and thus I learned of your great feat. So you are the English girl who threw the sand in old d'Ogeron's eyes and got clean away, with his ship and his prisoners to boot! 'Sdeath! You had the island in a turmoil when we arrived there, and but for the fact of our great force the Governor would have taken out his spite on us. He was like a wild man, yet sounded your praises withal—nor do I blame him."

It was Nancy's turn to blush anew at this, and when he offered her his arm, gallantly, she took it without a word and walked beside him to the cabin.

"And right glad am I of this meeting, too, eh Collier," he added. "We will need this stout ship she brings—though I confess the brigantine *Baptiste*, which I thought I knew full well——"

" 'Tis not the same," said Nancy impulsively, and then wished she had not spoken. "The *Baptiste* was lost in the storm and this is a ship which we, in our necessity, did take."

"What!" cried Captain Morgan, standing off and surveying her dramatically. "A good beginning, upon my soul, Collier! You see," he added, to Nancy, "we are met here in anticipation of an assault upon Maracaibo, on the Main, and for this purpose need another ship at least, and more men."

"But that," said she in considerable surprise, "is such an adventure as is no longer countenanced by His Majesty, so that I am in vast perplexity at finding you thus upon one of His Majesty's ships of war. Assuredly we can not be at war now with Spain."

"Nay," interrupted Captain Collier, with a sidelong glance at her boyish costume and the tangled mop of golden hair tumbling from beneath her cap, "we are always at war with Spain below the tropic."

"But I am told that Governor Modyford, at Jamaica, hath orders to prevent privateering in the Indies," she persisted.

"Had orders," corrected Captain Collier. "They have been modified. Od's fish! A neat jest, hey Morgan. Ha — ha — ha! Didst hear that—Modyford's orders modified. By my soul! 'Tis good enough to tell to the King, himself. Have you no sense of humor, Morgan?"

"Only a fair one, Collier," replied Morgan drily. "But what he hath said is true enough," he added, turning to Nancy. "I can not myself keep track of His Majesty's weathercock politics, now interfering with our business in these seas, and again countenancing our private warfare against Spain; nor do I concern myself much with them, for it has been England's policy since Drake's time to give sugar pills to the Spanish Ambassador at London while winking at what goes on in this part of the world. So I never know whether a treaty is in force or no, and so have dismissed the subject from my mind. Three months ago, at Spain's complaint, they were all for hanging at Port Royal some of the best men who have ever fought with me against the Papists. And now for some mysterious reason all this hath been changed, and Collier is to go with me to Maracaibo, clandestinely, but nathless he is to go."

"I do not pretend to know all that goes on in His Majesty's cabinet," said Captain Collier. "Adventuring against the Spaniard was vigorously put down for a time. But now it seems the Spanish Ambassador at London hath been hoodwinked again, and things are to be as before—until His Majesty is browbeaten once more by the Spanish crown. I myself have lately brought new orders to Jamaica, and this expedition has been secretly fitted out there by the Governor's orders. When we have dealt this blow to the Spanish power in the Americas, you will find a market for your spoils at London Bridge, an' you wish it."

"You inform me on a point I was much in ignorance on," replied Nancy.

"Join us," said Captain Morgan, "an' your exploit will be winked at. We have absolution in advance. The Captain here hath a pocketful of pardons in blank for such as may need the boon. But join us in the roundhouse and we will talk more at large."

They were at the cabin door now. But before they entered, Nancy nodded toward Yellow Eyes who still sat upon his coil of rope.

"How came you by the dumb man?" she asked.

"Why, as to that, how did you know he was dumb? One of my sloops that arrived this morning at daybreak picked the fellow up in an open boat, and all but dead from thirst. Do you know ought of him?"

"Faith!" cried Barney, who had been aching for a chance to enter the conversation, and until then had seen no opening. "He stowed himself in the forward hold, and we cut him adrift—that is, Nancy did, and so we didn't know what had happened to him —and here he is."

"Stowed himself in the forward hold, and you cut him adrift!" repeated Captain Morgan, a twinkle in his eye. "I see you know something of the fellow, although the explanation of the lad is not over clear."

"Ay, we know him," said Barney, his freckled face aglow with delight to be talking thus with the great Captain Morgan. "Why, 'twas he who betrayed us at the Governor's castle, and gave the alarm when we escaped from the fort on the hill."

Captain Morgan's face grew black as a thunder-cloud at this.

"A traitor, then!" he cried. "We give short shrift to such."

He called an order to his quartermaster.

"Throw this rogue below," he ordered roughly.

"Nay, have pity on him, sir, I beg of you," said Nancy, laying her hand upon the Captain's arm, "for though he hath been the source of all my misery, my heart swells for him—he is so wretched with his great affliction I can not bear the thought of his suffering. Spare him for my sake, for it was I who cast him adrift in the long-boat, so that he would have perished but for the accident of his discovery, and that would have been a sin upon my head."

"She talks like a Puritan," cried Captain Morgan.

But he gave an order to one of the men that Yellow Eyes should not be injured, and the dumb man was hauled away between two seamen, kicking and struggling, and carried into the hold. Then Captain Morgan led the way into the cabin where a great company of officers of the fleet were gathered, eating and drinking.

NANCY, in the place of honor at the head of the table, next to the two Captains, was obliged to tell the story of the escape of the English prisoners from the French at Tortuga, and of the part she had played. When she had finished, Captain Morgan ordered a salute of thirty guns to be fired in her honor.

While the cannon roared she studied the faces of her companions, and gave a start as she recognized a familiar figure, the little monk whom she had seen first in the market square at Lille, and then upon the ship in which she had been kidnaped, the little monk whom she had left apparently asleep beneath d'Ogeron's table.

"How came he here?" she asked, pointing him out.

"Who?"

"The monk."

"Monk!" roared Morgan, choking with laughter. "Little Cochinillo? Why, Madame, that is a better jest than Captain Collier's. Did he fool you with his cowl and habit? That is the greatest rascal unhung—three times a galley slave, twice branded. But a bright and happy soul, withal, and one of my men who fell wounded at Porto Bello and was sent off to Spain, but escaped from the hulks and so found his way back to the rendezvous, with the aid of his disguise, and indeed he has picked up a lot of the ritual at odd times and serves us very well in that capacity.

The monk, for so she called him, seeing himself under discussion, arose unsteadily to his feet, a bottle in one hand and a gobbet of greasy meat in the other, glibly told how d'Ogeron had commanded him to marry him to the girl, and how he had indignantly refused, and declared most solemnly that he had aided in her escape, whereupon Captain Morgan, Nancy making no contradiction, ordered a salute to be fired in his honor.

Then Barney recounted the story of the treachery of Yellow Eyes, and how he had wanted to go back and gag him. Whereat the jovial pirates roared with laughter, and Captain Morgan, in his hand a handsome silver goblet that he had stolen from the Governor of Porto Bello, drank his health in "Rosa Solis," a strong punch of brandy, spices and hot water, and ordered a salute of ten guns in his honor. And Barney, overcome by the honor, his whole face in complete eclipse, so widely distended were his joyous jaws, leaped upon the table and led the buccaneers in a round of mighty cheers that made the frigate shiver.

The admiration in the glances that Captain Morgan bestowed upon her made Nancy feel ill at ease. But she was taken all aback when suddenly he jumped up, and filling the silver goblet proposed her health.

"Look ye, Monk," said he, draining his tankard at a draft, "out with thy prayer-book, thou gospel-slinging shark, and read the marriage service. By the Gods! This Devon maid doth please me hugely. She is the first ever I thought fit to be the wife to Henry Morgan."

"Nay, sir," said she at this, her eyes filled with alarm, and drawing away from him as he bent down and sought to take her hand, "not so fast, I pray you, and besides, this is no priest, but an impostor."

"Think on it, Madame!" cried he, waving aside her objections. "Thou art a woman after my own heart—fearless and resourceful. Thou hast taken thy first ship as neatly as I could have done it myself, and that thou art here with thy men as their captain showeth me that thou hast ability withal. Join with me and we will scourge these Dons until they come to know who are masters in the Indies.

"Nay," he added, when she would have stopped him, "have no fear as to the consequences. For the time, the good old days of Drake and Hawkins have come back once more. Follow me and I will lead thee to riches and fame. Ay, I will make thee a Lady, for I do tell thee, Madame, when I return from this expedition upon which I am now setting forth I shall kneel at His Majesty's feet and he will say to me, 'Arise, Sir Henry Morgan.' "

The men, who had been listening to him with the attention that men ever give to those in authority above them, broke into cheers at this brave speech, and Bras-de-Mort, leaping up and proposing a volley of thirty guns in honor of their chief, and thirty more for his gracious majesty King Charles, such a volleying began again as showed these pirates to be as wasteful of their powder as, when they did have it, they were with their money.

"Show her the papers you have, Collier," Captain Morgan added when he could make himself heard between guns. "They will set her mind at rest, I warrant you. Secret instructions these be, Madame, for the benefit of Englishmen here on the Spanish Main, with pardons in blank for those that need them—a sort of general amnesty, indeed."

Captain Collier passed her then a packet of papers, bearing the royal seal. Nancy had just taken them, when, with a frightful roar and a great burst of flame which seemed to envelop the whole ship, and filled the roundhouse with heavy clouds of suffocating smoke, the forward magazine exploded. The first explosion was followed almost immediately, before the company could gain their feet, by another more terrible than the first, and the frigate seemed torn asunder by the force of it. The deck rose and crumbled beneath them, the mighty timbers were blown in all directions.

Of what happened after the first explosion Nancy never had a clear idea. Mechanically she thrust Captain Collier's papers into her shirt. Tongues of flame leaped toward her out of the billows of dense black smoke.

She shut her eyes in terror, and when she opened them she was in the depths of the sea, entangled in a mass of wreckage. She freed herself, and then, her lungs bursting with pain, shot to the surface.

As she came up, gasping and blowing, there, not a dozen strokes from her, was Barney, astride the shattered end of the mainmast. She swam toward him, and he dragged her to a place of safety beside him.

All about was débris and wreckage of every description, with here and there a man's head showing above the waves. As she looked, the shattered hull of the frigate in one last convulsion went down by the head, to be seen again no more.

Small boats put out immediately from the other vessels at anchor in the cove; and one from the *Snapdragon*, as they saw, pulled toward them.

"Faith, Mademoiselle," asked the Irish lad, when he had emptied himself of the salt water, "what happened?"

"The ship blew up, Barney lad," answered the girl, "and 'tis only by the mercy of God that we are alive. Few on board of her, I think, could have survived it."

"Did Captain Morgan, do you suppose?" he asked after a bit.

"Why, I do not know as to that—I can not see him anywhere."

"Would you care if he didn't?"

"Care, lad?"

"Ay."

"Of course I'd care, Barney."

"Well," he replied, giving her a queer look, "but I know one who wouldn't."

"And who might that be, Barney?"

"Captain Stillingfleet. Faith, he'd be wild if he knew what Captain Morgan said to you just now."

"Be quiet, Barney," said the girl sharply. "Captain Stillingfleet cares naught what Captain Morgan thinks of me."

"Oh, and doesn't he now?"

"Say no more of that to me, lad." Then, after a pause, "Barney, canst keep a secret?"

"Ay, that I can."

"Then I know who blew up the ship."

"Blew it up?"

"Ay, blew it up, Barney—for revenge."

"Revenge! You mean—" he lowered his voice to the most mysterious whisper at his command — "you mean Captain Stillingfleet."

"Thou art too ridiculous, Barney. Of course not! It was Yellow Eyes."

"The dumb man?"

"I feel sure of it. Look, there he is now!"

The boy turned as she pointed, and there struggling in the waves close by them, clinging to a spar, was the tongueless man, a great cut over his temple from which the blood gushed, staining the water all around him. A look of hatred blazed from his eyes.

The longboat from the *Snapdragon* was coming up rapidly now, with Cherie, her face as pale as death, crouching in the bow, and searching in the wreckage with restless eyes. They pointed the dumb man out to her, and he was hauled aboard. As they came on now to where they clung to the mainmast the French girl cried:

"Thank God you are saved! But where is my man? Have you seen aught of Bras-de-Mort?"

"I have seen him not," answered Nancy

sadly, "but some have been picked up by boats from the other ships. Please God, he is among them."

"Please God," echoed Cherie.

The longboat continued its search for those that might be saved, and the French girl continued her quest with eyes so blurred with tears she could scarcely see. At last they found the Frenchman in another boat and took him into their own, and then pulled back to the *Snapdragon*, picking up Jim Rimble and Trueheart Jackson on the way.

And so they returned to their own ship in safety, all who had gone away, with one among them they had not expected to see again. As they helped the dumb man over the side Barney plucked at Nancy's sleeve.

"Some day," said he, pointing significantly to Yellow Eyes, "he will go too far with me—that fellow."

CHAPTER XIII

CAPTAIN MORGAN LOSES A PRIZE

BACK on the quarterdeck of her own ship Captain Nancy paced restlessly. With a treasure of upwards of 300,000 crowns in the hold, the Spanish crew prisoners between decks, and Don Luis and his daughter under heavy guard, she realized that she was confronted by a situation demanding all that she had of tact and diplomacy, the more especially since Captain Stillingfleet was now not only no longer a friend, but an active enemy.

As for the treasure, she understood from what she had learned aboard the frigate that it might safely be kept as lawful prize. This she was determined to do, now that she had won the men to her leadership by that promise. As for the Spanish Captain, it was but loyalty to her father and the cause to keep this interloper from the stolen estates that awaited him in England, and this also she was resolved to accomplish.

With the Spaniards set ashore on some island, she could count upon the greed and the love of adventure of her men to keep them in those seas as long as she might choose to stay. And this she vowed to do until it became too late for Godfrey Stillingfleet to work any injury to General Sidney and her father, or the other Puritan conspirators in France.

But as she pondered upon these considerations the conviction was borne home to her that, after all, they were really trivial beside another matter which forced itself upon her attention as often as she sought to thrust it into the background.

Captain Henry Morgan was not to be disposed of so easily, and as she went over again and again the scene in the great cabin of the *Oxford*, that had terminated so dramatically and terribly, yet so providentially for her, she realized that in this big, masterful, self-confident Welsh buccaneer she had to deal with a man of a different stamp from any whom she had ever known before —a man who was accustomed to have his way in all things, who was not to be deterred by any considerations whatsoever from the accomplishment of any undertaking upon which he might fix his iron will.

And so, contemplating her predicament from every angle, she resolved upon a measure that was like to be her undoing. In the pirate's love-making, rude as it was, there had been a depth of passion she had not failed to recognize, nor did it repel her. For try as she would to rid herself of its appeal, the primal woman in her responded to it with a force she could resist but not deny. The thought of him made her conscious for the first time of her ragged shirt and coarse breeches, her sunburned arms and limbs. Looking over the rail in thoughtful mood, the burnished waters of the Caribbean sent back to her troubled eyes a reflection that brought a blush to her tanned cheeks.

"I'll do it!" she whispered softly to herself, and quitting the quarterdeck, all breathless with excitement, demanded of the Fleming who was on guard before the forecastle that he summon to her Cherie, the French girl, she burst into the cabin that had been occupied by the Spanish Captain's daughter.

"Well, Mistress Chillingworth," said she to herself, "now that thou hast turned pirate, as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb. Since I have stolen a whole ship, 'twill be no greater sin to add the theft of a few clothes to my other crimes."

With this she began to rummage in the Spanish girl's chests, and presently, finding that for which she searched, had the whole cabin littered with linens and silks. But first she let down her tawny hair, and assisted by Cherie who tore herself away from Bras-de-Mort, combed out the snarls, dancing about with shrieks and groans, for the process, after so long a neglect, was a painful one. Then she fell upon the petticoats, the laces and ribbons.

An hour passed. Another slipped by. Nancy and Cherie were oblivious to their surroundings, intoxicated by the greatest of all feminine delights. From this blissful state they were aroused by a hail and the tramp of feet upon the deck. Mindful of her duties and obligations then, she threw open the door and stepped out, just as Captain Morgan came over the side.

The buccaneer regarded her for a long instant as if he had been suddenly cast into bronze. Then off came his wide-brimmed hat, with its nodding crimson plume that swept the deck, what with the great bow he made.

"Madame," said he, taking her hand and kissing it as gallantly as if he had been a courtier, "the explosion on the frigate just now interrupted me. I have come to resume where I left off, and to say that I have fetched the monk along. S'death! Madame, my heart felt near to bursting when first I saw you yonder, and now that I behold you in your proper person I am all the more aflame for you."

But though the softness of his eyes, which for the moment lost their customary hardness, bore witness to the ardor of his words, his glances were not so wholly occupied with the scrutiny of the beauty of her face and girlish figure as to be oblivious to the beauty of the ship, which he was quick to note and to appreciate in hull and spars as in the line and color of a pretty woman. To both he gave his frank admiration, and, being no less a seaman than a lover, was so entirely impartial that he bestowed his praises equally upon both, in the same breath, until it seemed, that, with a most remarkable economy of language, as befitting a man of action rather than of speech, he made a single word serve a double duty.

"S'blood, Madame!" he cried, with another great bow and flourish. "Well rigged thou art, truly, nor over-rigged to wrong you in your sailing. A great rake forwards on, like a French craft, which is as I like, making for the more speed."

Leading the way into the roundhouse, as if he felt himself already master there, his exclamations of delight increased with every step he took, until at last he cried:

"By our Lady! Madame, we are well met, indeed. Here you have as stanch a vessel of fourteen guns as ever I hope to see, and ports could be cut on the gun-deck for more ordnance, though I depend not upon my cannon in a fight, so that I can sail my ship to lay aboard, and bring my enemy under the musket fire of my men. Still, I scorn them not, and we can use them.

"Such another ship as this with us, an' the frigate had not blown up and bereft me of my largest, and I would take Panama this expedition. Join me in my plans, Madame, and though the larger undertaking be deferred until a later time, nathless we shall go away now to the Main and gain a king's ransom from the rich Spanish cities, you, as my wife, to share equally with me in the adventure, and your men to share equally with my own, on the terms which they well know, as the code of the brethren of the coast—no purchase, no pay. Come, marry me and sail with me."

"As to the second part of your proposal, sir," replied Nancy, seating herself at the table where she had drawn up the agreement with her English comrades, "I confess it hath much to commend itself as well to my taste as to my desires."

Morgan smiled and rubbed his hands with a gesture of satisfaction.

"As for the rest of what you say, sir," she added, "I thank you for the compliment you have paid me, but that can never be."

"Can never be?" echoed Captain Morgan.

"Nay, sir, it is impossible," she answered, turning her eyes from his. "I—I—I have promised myself to another," she faltered, stammering, and daring not to look at him.

"S'death, Madame," answered the buccaneer nonchalantly, as if vastly relieved, "do not let that trouble you. Were you already married, nathless I would wed thee still."

"But that would be a sin, sir," cried Nancy, looking at the pirate with wide-open eyes.

Captain Morgan threw back his head and laughed a hearty laugh that shook his whole huge frame.

"S'blood, Madame!" he returned, when he could recover his breath. "There is no such thing as sin below the tropic, so make your mind easy on that score, my lady, and I will fetch the monk in and have the service read."

Whereupon he whistled loudly. Two of

his men, savage-looking fellows, bareheaded and unkempt, with knives and pistols in their belts, slouched up and gave him a rude salute. He bade them summon the priest, and presently Cochinillo, the pretended monk, appeared from the direction of the cook-room, a pig's knuckle in one hand and in the other a hunk of half-baked dough. His heavy face shone with grease. With a sigh he thrust the bone and the bread into his habit and entered the cabin, rubbing his hands upon his frock.

"HAST thou thy prayer-book about thee, monk?" roared the pirate.

The little man choked out an inarticulate answer, sending forth a cloud of crumbs and gristle from his mouth that was so crammed with food that very likely he would have strangled to death before their eyes had not the buccaneer rained a shower of mighty blows between his shoulders.

"Curse thee!" cried Captain Morgan. "Thou art always stuffing thy belly. Out with thy book and say thy mumble and jumble over us, and be quick about it! For lack of a real priest you will suit me as well as another."

"Not so fast, Captain Morgan, an you please, sir!" Nancy's face had gone quite pale. "Did I not tell you that I was already bespoken?" She blushed and hung her head. "Well, not that, exactly," she faltered, "but I have already promised myself to another. I can not marry you."

"That's what she told d'Ogeron," spluttered the monk.

"Silence!" bellowed Morgan. "Curses on d'Ogeron, and on you too. Think you I am to be thwarted of my desires because he knew not that a woman's 'no' means 'yes'?"

He passed quickly around the table and grasped the girl, though not over-roughly, by the arm. Though she saw in his flushed face and his eyes, wherein lay a light that burned with brilliance, no intent to do her harm, but only desire and love for her, she shrank from him with alarm and uttered a sharp cry that brought the boy Barney to the cabin door, a smile dying away on his freckled face. Not having witnessed the beginning of the scene within the roundhouse, and totally mistaking the motives and attitude of Captain Morgan, his Irish mouth quivered like a terrier's.

Barney's admiration for the mighty pirate, whose fame in those seas he had been drinking in around the forecastle lamp, vanished in an instant. His ideas were ever good ones, but in his singularly simple mind there was room for but one at a time. He saw only his friend and comrade upon the defensive before the Welshman, and without waiting to inquire into the circumstances, he bounded into the cabin, and with the spring of a young wolf threw himself full tilt upon the buccaneer, digging his claws into the man's brawny throat and feeling with his teeth for his ear.

Captain Morgan, giant though he was, staggered beneath the onslaught, which took him so by surprise that it all but threw him off his feet. But he quickly recovered himself, not without effort, and shaking off the lad as a dog would have rid himself of a rat clinging to his nose, sent Barney reeling into the partition, where he lay in a corner dazed and dizzy, the blood streaming from a cut over his right eye.

"Shame, Captain Morgan!" Nancy cried hotly, dropping to her knees beside the Irish boy. "'Tis but a lad!"

"Nay, you wrong me, Madame," replied the pirate sheepishly. "He took me so by surprise I scarcely thought on what I was doing. S'death! He flew at me like a lion."

"He did but go to my rescue, sir," answered the girl, "as he hath ever done since first we met in the market-place at Lille."

"Then he is my friend—and shall ever be. Come, lad, my hand on it."

He held out his huge fist, but Barney, scowling and shaking his head, refused it and climbed weakly to his feet, and stood there glaring at him and wiping the blood upon his shirt.

"Nay, lad," continued the buccaneer, "but be my friend and you shall never need another. There is a common bond between us—I love your mistress as you do, ay, ten thousand times more. And just now, when you rushed to her succor, I meant her no injury, but was but telling her of my love and asking her to be my wife, that we might go away together to the Spanish Main on an adventure that most certainly would bring riches to all of us.

"And you shall go with us, lad, and for your faithfulness to her in the past, and because you love her, too, you shall share with us far above your rank and service, and go home to England at last with money jingling in your pocket. Come, lad, say you will be friend to Henry Morgan. Go with us, where gold, and fame, and the zest of a man's life await us, and we shall have our hearts' desires, all of us—my hand upon it."

There was the glow of romance and the lure of glory in his words, and a depth of passion in his voice that sent the warm blood tingling and dancing through Nancy's veins. For one rebellious moment her heart responded to their appeal with a surging desire. All the wantonness of her untamed nature was crying to be free, to follow this freebooter wherever his insatiable lust for gold might lead him.

If he had seized her then in his arms he might have had her for the asking; but he let his moment of opportunity pass him by unheeded, as every man does with some woman once in a lifetime. And so there slipped from Henry Morgan a greater prize than all the treasures the Spanish Indies held, for Nancy, turning now to Barney, saw in his face hatred and doubt and mistrust. Her ardor cooled. Composure returned to her. She was once more mistress of herself.

When Barney slunk out of the cabin, and Captain Morgan addressed her once more he found her shrinking from him as before. While the Irish lad sped down the deck to the forecastle, whispering an excited word to every man he met, and finally, followed by Jim Rimble and Pierre, his whiskers bristling, dived down below on some mysterious mission, Captain Morgan returned to the assault of the citadel of her heart, only to find it more strongly fortified than ever, so that in his arguments he passed from persuasion to force.

Eloquence gave way to anger, and failing by less peaceful means to return to that stage of his love-making where he had found himself when interrupted, he adopted methods to which he was more accustomed, and had just taken Nancy, protesting, in his arms, when the cabin door was burst open and Captain Stillingfleet was there, a dozen British faces framing the companionway behind him.

So Henry Morgan released the girl from his embrace, for there was something in Godfrey's mien that held his eager attention, even as it held Nancy's, a look that he had never seen before in such eyes or upon such firm lips, but that Nancy had seen there in the flash of the lightning on the old *Baptiste* the night he had taken her in his arms, and kissed her, and she beheld it with different emotions, too, for whereas the buccaneer felt instinctively for his pistols she as instinctively felt for her handkerchief—the Spanish girl's handkerchief. Not having included that article of toilette in her borrowed plumage, she forbore to weep.

Captain Morgan also changed his mind. He found the hilt of his pistol, but did not draw, and not solely because of the compelling look in the deep blue eyes Master Stillingfleet fastened upon him. Those faces in the doorway also carried a message for him which he was quick to read.

CHAPTER XIV

CAPTAIN STILLINGFLEET TAKES COMMAND

"WHO, in God's name," said Captain Morgan, after a pause, very coolly, and measuring his antagonist at his leisure, taking note of the breadth and the brawn of him, "may you be, and to what do I owe this intrusion?"

"If you have not heard my name, that is a misfortune you may repair in your own way and in your own time," replied Captain Stillingfleet coldly. "As for what I am doing here, since when has it been an intrusion for the master of a ship to step into his own roundhouse?"

"You master here!" exclaimed the pirate with an incredulous sneer. "Nay, but the maid is Captain. Her own men did confirm it not long since on my own ship that was lately blown up under me."

"Did Mistress Nancy tell you she was Captain?" demanded Captain Stillingfleet, still looking at the buccaneer with unblinking eyes.

"Why, as to that, no; but she did act the part."

"That is as it may be. But since she did not tell you that she is in command I will tell you that I am." And with this he smiled at the girl, as if to say, "Now is your opportunity to speak."

But Nancy, glancing then in vexation at Captain Morgan, bit her lip, and said nothing. Captain Morgan, looking sharply at the men framed against the sky in the cabin door heard him add, "Ay, ask them, an' you will, since you doubt my word." And he turned full upon Jim Rimble such a look that started him spluttering.

"Ay, he is our captain," said Jim Rimble huskily, clearing his throat and glaring in his turn at his comrades. " 'Tis a man's work."

"I can talk with you as well as with another," said Captain Morgan, addressing Captain Stillingfleet in a more conciliatory tone. "My business is come to quickly. I have urged this lady here to go away with me to Maracaibo on the Main, where the Spaniards have rich settlements, and where we can find gold and silver as well as huge quantities of dyes and goods withal, and precious gems."

"Think you we would be such fools as to do your fighting, only to have you in the end gain the lion's share of the spoils?" demanded Captain Stillingfleet, while the men behind him nodded their approval.

"As for that, I can quiet your alarms," replied the pirate briskly, "by offering to you the same terms I have offered to Madame."

"The same terms?"

"No purchase, no pay—the law of the coast—you and your men to share equally with my own lieutenants and my own men. The same terms I offered her, save in one particular."

"And what was the exception?"

"That she be my wife and share equally with me."

"That shall never be!" cried Captain Stillingfleet, more vehemently than he had yet spoken.

"So she hath told me herself," returned the buccaneer dryly.

"Ah!"

"The lady it seems, will have naught of me."

A smile beamed in the eyes of Godfrey Stillingfleet. Then they darkened quickly as the pirate added with genuine feeling in his voice:

"She hath promised herself to another. S'death!" he finished savagely, and putting his hand again upon the hilt of his pistol, "perchance thou art the man."

"Nay," answered Captain Stillingfleet, while Nancy hung her head and would not look at him. "That is not my good fortune."

"S'blood! Since we are both in the same boat, it should be easy for us to come to terms. Go away with me on this adventure and you shall fare as I do, forty shares between us, and as for the girl, an you please, we will let the dice decide that issue between us two."

It seemed to Nancy that Captain Stillingfleet would never speak. She dared not look at him. There was no sound but the shuffling of the men's feet upon the deck and the lapping of the tide along the side. Then she heard his voice. All he said was—

"No!"

But there was such a positive finality in his deep, vibrant tones that even Captain Morgan was struck.

"You refuse me?"

"When we go pirating we go on our own account, asking favors of none, sharing our booty only among ourselves."

There was a murmur of approval behind him, and Barney's shrill voice chortling as he capered about the deck outside.

"As for the girl," added Captain Stillingfleet, "though she be not master here, she is mistress. We are guided not by her commands but by her wishes. If she declines to marry you or have ought to do with your schemes, Captain Morgan, rest assured she will not lack for arms to back up those refusals."

The satisfaction of the crew of the *Snapdragon*, that is to say, of the Englishmen who had been taken off Tortuga, increased at this, and Barney's countenance thrust between Jim Rimble's knotty legs bore a smile so incredibly vast that one would have sworn he did not have a freckle to his name.

"Ay!" boomed Jim Rimble, rolling his eyes at his mates as he spoke. "She will not lack for arms."

"Since that is your decision," replied Captain Morgan, making no great effort to hide his chagrin, "mayhap you have powder and ball that you could spare me from your store. I do assure you, the loss of the *Oxford* just now, with all her ammunition, was a heavy blow."

"That is another matter, and may be arranged," answered Captain Stillingfleet. "We have seven or eight hundred pigs of lead which we would gladly exchange for salted and smoked meat of hogs and cattle and such other provisions as you may have by you in greater abundance than you need."

"Call it settled then," agreed the pirate with an attempt at good humor. "I will send aboard the victuals you stand in need of and my men will fetch away the lead."

The bargain being struck, Captain Morgan called his boat and went off to his own ship anchored further up the cove, in shore, though not without a parting bow to Nancy, who sat now dejectedly at the cabin table, crestfallen at the course events had taken, yet considering herself fortunate, on the whole, at the successful termination of what had threatened to become an awkward situation for her. Already her mind was busy with the future, searching for some play whereby she would be able to gain once more the upper hand, and not doubting but that she should find one.

Before Morgan had fairly pushed off Captain Stillingfleet, full of large schemes, was busily engaged putting them into execution. He set the men at work, bringing up the pigs of lead, which fortunately were stowed away in the forward hold where they could be got at readily without disturbing or disclosing the Spanish prisoners. And by the time Captain Morgan returned, this time in a longboat full of men, great piles of the metal lay in the scuppers waiting to be taken off.

CAPTAIN MORGAN, in thoughtful mood, paced the deck, and seemed much pleased at the sight of so much lead, but whether the brain behind his restless eyes was busy with thoughts of how he should use it against the Dons, or shaped a plot boding ill for Nancy and himself, Captain Stillingfleet, who watched the pirate and his tatterdemalions narrowly, could by no means make out.

The buccaneer made no move to return to his own ship when the first boat-load of lead went over the side and was pulled off, nor did any of the victuals and provisions he had promised in return make an appearance. Two of his men he dispatched to the island with orders which he whispered to them, and then fell to pacing the deck again moodily, as the *Snapdragon's* crew toiled over their task in the broiling sun.

Now and then the pirate turned upon Captain Stillingfleet his searching eyes, but there was something in the young fellow's Saxon face that evidently did not wholly please him. For after such scrutinies he would scowl and grind his jaws and turn his attention to the men, as if mentally taking stock of them. And Stillingfleet, quite well aware that the buccaneer had sailed with some of them in the past, was not easy in his mind.

Casting an eye ashore, he observed that the buccaneers were flocking down to the beach in large numbers and putting off in small boats.

Convincing himself of this, he turned from the rail to find Morgan deep in converse with Jim Rimble, and stepping quickly up to them, not liking the look he saw in the sailor's eyes, he heard the pirate captain say something about "Maracaibo," and saw Jim Rimble go off among the men forward. Stillingfleet pulled out a pistol.

"Hark ye, Captain Morgan," he said. "I am not the man to stand for anybody stirring up mutiny on my ship." And with this he presented his piece at the pirate's head, and cocked it.

Morgan laughed in his face, a coarse, reckless, self-confident laugh of a strong man who felt sure of his ground.

"What if I did speak with these men," he returned. "Will they hold it against me that I offer them a chance for gold?"

Some of the men nearest them, seeing what was going on, stopped their work, now almost done, for the lead was all on deck, and slouched up. Captain Morgan caught Jim Rimble's eye and smiled at him.

Jim Rimble grinned back, pulling at his forelock and shifting uneasily on his feet. He had chipped off from some of the pigs of lead a handful of ragged pieces of metal, and these he jingled nervously in his palms, so that they clinked and rattled musically.

"Ay, lads," said Morgan mockingly, "suppose those were pieces-of-eight—money, lads, instead of sinkers for Jim Rimble's fishing lines. Would you hold that, too, against Henry Morgan?"

"Have done with this talk, sir," said Captain Stillingfleet sternly, and went forward to superintend the removal of the last boat-loads of the lead, Morgan's pirates having come back for the balance of it.

He was anxious to get the work over with and clear his ship of these buccaneers. Leaning over the side he saw that the pirates had returned, this time heavily armed, and some of them had muskets concealed in their boats. When the last of the lead had been stowed away, instead of shoving off as they had done before, they swarmed back over the side and trooped down to the rail of the quarterdeck.

"Ho for Maracaibo!" shouted Jim Rimble, carried away with enthusiasm, and throwing his bits of metal into the air in his excitement.

"Ho for Maracaibo!" shouted the others in a roaring chorus.

Emotional fellows, simple as children for all their rogueries, they were swept for the moment off their feet by the glitter of gold in Morgan's glowing words. They looked questioningly at Nancy, who came now from her cabin, followed by Yellow Eyes, who appeared mysteriously from some hiding-place, and the shouts died down as quickly as they had risen. There was a moment of silence, a thick, heavy, ominous silence, the kind of a silence that fills the world the moment before a hurricane strikes, and then the sharp clatter of Jim Rimble's fishing sinkers as they fell back upon the deck.

One of them rolled to where the dumb man stood blinking in the sunlight, his yellow eyes burning like polished gold. His fiery orbs rested for an instant upon the tiny disk that had fallen at his feet. He stooped and picked it up, smelled of it, bit it, threw it up and caught it, and then went leaping about the deck like a madman, as if suddenly bereft of his senses.

With the bit of metal clutched in his fingers he rushed among the men, forcing them to look upon it, pointing to it, making the most horrible grimaces in his hopeless efforts to speak. Catching sight of a longboat loaded with the lead and made fast at the side, he threw himself into her and groveled among the pigs, covering them with his slobbery kisses, caressing them, endeavoring to carry one in his arms. This being too much for even his great strength, he scrambled back over the bulwarks and ran about again among the men, grunting and groaning.

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"CURSE the fellow!" cried Captain Morgan, backing away from him, and all but stumbling overboard in his haste. "He must be possessed of the devil. I would not have him on my ship for all the gold in Peru. Speak, fool, and have done with thy gibberish. What art thou trying to say? The sight of so much lead hath befuddled thee. When I cast it I shall have a care to make a bullet that will fit thy skull."

Yellow Eyes, who had stopped his frenzy to listen to this speech, went fairly beside himself, his tongueless gullet filled with froth, his great arms moving convulsively. Little Cochinillo, crossing himself piously, as if he had been a real monk, scurried for the side, shouting at the top of his voice:

"He's a witch! He's a witch!" and dived into the sea.

The pirates waited for no more. With blanched faces they made a rush for their boats and tumbled into them, shaking and trembling.

"Come back, you fools!" roared Captain Morgan. "How can a man be a witch?"

But they paid no heed, and took themselves off to a safe distance.

Stopping for a moment the dumb man paused as if thinking, then made a rush for the companionway.

"Don't let him go below, men!" cried Captain Stillingfleet impulsively. "He'll turn the prisoners loose or else disclose the treasure to these pirates."

With the snarl of a wild animal, Yellow Eyes drew a knife from his shirt and rushed upon the Devon man, who caught his wrist in an iron grip, twisting it until the blade fell to the deck. But if Godfrey was strong, the dumb man in his frenzy was his master, and breaking the hold, he sprang back, and, picking up an ax that lay in the scuppers, he hurled it with all his strength. Captain Stillingfleet dodged, but not quickly enough. The ax struck him a glancing blow in the head and he went down like an ox.

With a scream of mingled rage and grief, Nancy looked about her for a weapon, tears of fury in her eyes.

"Give me thy pistol," she demanded of Captain Morgan, who stood apart, a curious light in his eyes.

"Nay," he replied. "Wait a bit. What was it Master Stillingfleet said just now of prisoners—and treasure? There is more mystery here than I had thought on, and the man yonder, for all his dumbness, may give me the clew."

He raised his hand, that the men in the small boats, still at some distance from the ship, might see him, and gave a long, whistling call.

"Would you spare the scoundrel who blew up your ship, and see him kill the finest Devon man since Francis Drake?" shouted the girl, fairly beside herself.

"Blew up the *Oxford!*" cried Captain Morgan.

"Ay, that he did, I will swear. Canst thou not see it in his evil eyes? The man was born a devil and does not deserve to live—nor shall I spare him now. He hath come at last to his reckoning with me, for the injuries he hath done me since he kidnaped me out of France; for the murder that he did upon the old *Baptiste*; for the betrayal of us all at Tortuga; ay, and for killing the man I—I—love," she finished, turning an agonized face to where young Stillingfleet lay upon the deck. "Here is an account I shall pay home myself, an' no one else will aid me."

With this the dumb man, in his molten eyes a thousand demons gleaming, suddenly thrust his hand within his shirt, and when it came forth again there was a pistol in it. He raised it to the level of her forehead, and ran his burnished eye along the barrel, just as Barney McGiggen and Three-legs came racing down the deck together.

The lad threw himself in front of the girl as the tongueless one fired. Then he pitched headlong to the deck without a moan, while Nancy, at his back, clasped her breast with both hands and sank beside him, for the same bullet had pierced them both.

There was the flash of a tawny body, and with a deep-chested roar the three-legged dog for the second time in its short life hurled himself straight at the throat of Yellow Eyes, and his teeth met in the man's corded neck. Had he been a full-grown dog he would have killed him, but even so the force of his weight and the snap of those jaws bore the dumb man backward, and he went down with a crash, just as Captain Stillingfleet rolled over in the scuppers and pulled himself to his feet. He took the situation in at a glance, and observing Captain Morgan leaning over the rail, cursing his men and ordering them to come back, and catching him unawares, suddenly lifted him bodily in his arms and hurled him overboard.

"Heave ahead, men in the tops, men upon the yards!" he commanded. "Get the sails to the yards, men, and step lively. Who is at the wheel there?"

As Pierre took the helm and put it over, he cut the anchor cables with his own hand, and the *Snapdragon* swung around and drifted down the cove on the tide. Fired by his zeal, and catching the meaning of his hurried orders, the men flew to obey. Then Captain Stillingfleet gathered Nancy into his arms. Standing over Yellow Eyes for a moment he said:

"Now, lads, take the dog off that human devil. We will attend to him later."

And then he bore the girl into the shade of the roundhouse where he laid her down again upon the deck, her head in Cherie's lap.

Bras-de-Mort and Jim Rimble, manning the gun on the poop, trained it upon the pirates and warned them that if they fired with their muskets or tried to come aboard they would sink them. Loaded down as they were with the pigs of lead, they dared not adventure, but picked up Captain Morgan and pulled off for their own ships, which presently they boarded and got under way.

But by that time the *Snapdragon*, under all the canvas she could carry, was clear of the island, so that the buccaneers, seeing the hopelessness of the chase, soon gave it over and went about. And they saw them no more.

"Will she live?" asked Captain Stillingfleet, on his knees by Nancy.

Cherie nodded.

"Thank God! But better dead than that she had fallen a prize to Henry Morgan. And how is the lad?" he added, as Bras-de-Mort and Jim Rimble came up. "I need not ask. And he loved her, too."

His eyes filled with tears. He left the little group gathered about Nancy and went and stood by the rail. The wind was very fresh outside, with the Caribbean rolling and tumbling beneath it.

"How's her head, Mr. Helmsman?" he asked presently.

"South, southeast, sir," replied Pierre in a voice thick with emotion.

"Keep her full and let her go through the water."

"Ay, ay, sir."

CHAPTER XV

JIM RIMBLE'S KEEPSAKE

WHEN Mistress Nancy opened her eyes she was lying on the deck in the shadow of the round house, her head in Cherie's lap, and the sun was going down in the west, and sprinkling with flecks of gold the rippling wake the *Snapdragon* left in the blue waters of the Caribbean. She smiled faintly into the tear-dimmed eyes of the Frenchwoman, then closed her own again.

When next her lids fluttered open Captain Stillingfleet was bending over her.

"Where is Barney?" she asked, so softly they barely heard her. These were the first words she had spoken since she had lost consciousness.

Captain Stillingfleet's eyes filled and a lump rose in his throat, so that he could not answer her, but pointed silently to a small object lying stiffly on the quarter-deck, covered by a sail.

Nancy raised herself with an effort, then sank back, moaning.

"Dead?" she whispered brokenly.

He nodded, "yes."

"Dead! Oh, dear God, for me! For me! He died for me! Oh! Barney boy, come back to me, come back to me, lad, for I am all alone and need you so." A convulsive sob choked her throat.

"Hush, dear heart," whispered Cherie. "You, also, are badly hurt. Do not give way to your grief, for 'twill be your death."

"He died for me;" moaned Nancy, "he died for me, just as he said he would. 'Mademoiselle,' he said to me, there on the island, Cherie, you remember, 'Mademoiselle, I would lay down my life for you.' And now he has kept his word. Oh, Barney, Barney boy, come back, come back to me." Her cry died away in a wail, and she was silent, her bosom heaving. Then, faintly:

"We are under way?"

"Yes. We got off just in time," answered Captain Stillingfleet.

"Just in time?"

"Yes; hush, you must not exert yourself."

"Just in time? Ah, I remember—Captain Morgan. His men, I thought, were over-armed when they came aboard the last time. I feared he meant us a mischief."

"I was sure of it. But we got clean away, what with leaving behind the bow anchors; and though he gave us chase, we showed him a clean pair of heels, so that he soon gave it over and put back."

"And you, I suppose," said the girl, after a pause, "have taken command of the ship?"

" 'Twas a duty, Madame," he answered, "I could no longer neglect."

She said nothing to this for a long time, lying quietly, with eyes closed, scarcely breathing, it seemed to Captain Stillingfleet, who watched her anxiously. Then—

"Whither, sir, if I may ask?"

"For London."

"London! But we were to go adventuring, sir, I and my men, to seek gold wherewith to buy their pardons. I must keep my troth with them."

"I thought you had business in London, Madame, and sickose, I have, and pressing business, too. But you must rest quietly and give over all cares to me, for I perceive the fever is coming upon you."

"Nay, Captain Stillingfleet," she answered, "I did not think you would be so base to play me false when I am ill, nor the men, neither. Would you see them lashed through the streets of London at the tail of a cart, or hanged on Tyburn? About ship, sir!

"Jim Rimble!" she screamed, as the delirium she had been fighting off, at length overwhelmed her. "Jim Rimble! Pierre! Ho, lads, tumble up. Away aloft and shorten sail! Let fly to'gallant sheets! How's your helm, Mr. Quartermaster? Put it hard to port. Go below, Captain Stillingfleet. No, dear God, that I would not shoot you, save that I had no other course—then would I pistol you with my own hand. No—no—no! Forgive me, sir, but go below."

She stopped, exhausted. Her shrill voice, that had brought the men up upon their tiptoes, with tears in their eyes, sank to a whisper. She lay still. Then in a more natural tone:

"Yellow Eyes! It all comes back to me now. Where is the dumb man?" she finished with a shudder that shook her whole slender frame. "Where is the tongueless man who killed my Barney?"

"Hush, Nancy, hush, I beg you," said Captain Stillingfleet. "The man with the yellow eyes will trouble you never again. I turned him off at the foreyard arm."

She looked at him dully at first, not comprehending. And then with a shiver, for all her fever, she twisted herself around and looked upward to where he pointed.

SILHOUETTED against the tropic sky the sinister body of the dumb man dangled from a spar, swinging gently with the motion of the ship. Nancy's head fell back and she sank upon the deck, and Captain Stillingfleet, cursing his stupidity, gathered her limp form in his arms and with his lips in her hair carried her into the cabin.

And many days dragged by before she came out again, to walk slowly up and down the long sweep of deck, with Captain Stillingfleet and Cherie at her side; days that left her but the shadow of herself, that had robbed her cheeks of their tan and roses.

As the pain from the wound left her breast, another more agonizing still took its place, for Godfrey Stillingfleet maintained toward her an attitude of almost studied indifference save where her safety and comfort were concerned. Attentive as a father in everything affecting her welfare, Nancy thought, with an anguish she concealed from him if not from herself, that he was far too fatherly in all his other relations. Somewhere from out of the nightmare of her illness there came to her vaguely the recollection of being in his arms, of feeling his kisses upon her hair, but she could never bring herself to ask him, or even Cherie, if it were only a dream.

"How comes it, Captain Stillingfleet," she asked him one day, when they were well past the Azores, and she sat on deck, wrapped in a shawl, with Three-legs at her feet, "that I see aboard no sign of the Spanish prisoners. Where are they—Don Luis and his—daughter?"

"Put ashore, as was the original agreement," answered Captain Stillingfleet so indifferently that she studied his face with something more like peace in her soul than she had known for weeks.

"On some island?"

"On the main of Hispaniola. After Yellow Eyes—after the dumb man had gone, we put in and set them ashore, and left them with water and victuals sufficient for their needs."

"So," she thought, her being bathed in a great contentment, "he does not love her, after all."

Then, after musing a while, she added, aloud:

"I thank you, Captain Stillingfleet, for following my wishes when you took command."

He looked a little sheepish at this, and then, with a wry smile, said:

"By St. Bride! I had no choice in the matter."

"No choice? I do not understand."

"The men. I would have had a mutiny on my hands."

"Oh!"

"They said the agreement had been reached to maroon the Spaniards, Don Luis and all, and that did I not choose to do it myself, they would seize the ship. And Pierre, the French pilot, joining them, for your sake, he said, I had no alternative, for in him they had a navigator, and so I lost my hold over them."

"So," thought she, "it was not from indifference he left her," and fell into serious mood once more.

Another long pause. Then—

"And the boy—Barney?"

"We buried him at sea," replied Captain Stillingfleet very tenderly, "with all the honors of war. Oh, Nancy, Nancy, do not weep; I can not bear to see you in tears."

She dried her eyes and smiled a wan little smile, when Jim Rimble came rolling up and held out a bit of a trinket on a string with a gesture of such honest devotion that her heart was touched.

"A keepsake from old Jim, Miss—Captain, I mean, asking your pardon," he stammered huskily. "One of them there sinkers o' mine that set off Yellow Eyes in such a fit and started all the trouble. I hammered it out round like, and put my mark on it, ma'am, a cross-bones and skull, and run a string through it. I thought on how you might wear it, Miss—Captain, I mean, as was, for Jim Rimble's sake, to remember him by, Miss—Captain, I mean."

"Why, that I truly will, Jim Rimble," laughed Nancy, grasping his hand. "I shall wear it for you, and in memory of the profession I entered but did not practise. But for the high-handed proceeding of Captain Stillingfleet in running off with our ship, I should have been a pirate like——"

She stopped suddenly, and fell to musing. Presently she asked:

"Captain Stillingfleet, how comes it these fellows return so willingly with you to England?"

Captain Stillingfleet chuckled.

"Why, Madame," says he, "you yourself have provided a scheme whereby they can all go back, and I have told them of it; and hugely pleased they are, indeed."

"I provided a scheme? I know of none."

"Ay."

He pulled from his coat a packet of papers, and in a flash she recognized them.

"Why," said she, starting up excitedly, "I have seen those before."

"As I have surmised."

"How came you by them, sir?"

"I found them in the cabin where you had left them in your haste to don the

Spanish girl's habit. And I concluded that you had brought them off with you from the *Oxford*, when she was blown up."

"Why, and so I did, to be sure. Captain Collier passed them to me a moment or two before the explosion which killed him took place. I remembered no more until I found myself in the sea."

"You must have thrust them within your shirt to save them, and so come off with them safely."

" 'Tis possible."

" 'Tis likely."

" 'Tis lucky, too. Those papers contain pardons for such as Captain Collier might wish to favor, for so he told me."

"Ay, that is true," said Captain Stillingfleet. "Pardons in blank; leastways they were in blank."

"Were?"

"See, I have filled them out in the names of those among us who need them."

"And generous of you, I call it, too, to think of them and try to aid them," she said. "Sometimes, Captain Stillingfleet, I have thought you did not have a heart. And it was clever of you to think of it, too."

"Necessity sharpened my wits."

"How so?"

"After we had got rid of the prisoners, the men fell to grumbling before the mast. They feared we did not have enough treasure to buy pardons for all, and were hot for seeking more. In desperation, I thought of this scheme, and so wrote their names down upon the pardons. This satisfied them, and so they came back to England at last, willingly enough."

"Can they return in safety?"

"Ay, under the king's name they can walk the streets of London free men, and none may touch them."

"And with gold in their pockets?"

"That is as may be," he answered.

But this did not disturb her, for, thought she, if there was to be war with Spain again below the tropic, she and her men could profit from it as well as any. Presently she added:

"Let me take the papers, Captain Stillingfleet. I would examine them, for they have set my mind at rest upon a subject that hath been causing me great perplexity."

They were walking now into the roundhouse, where Nancy, seizing a quill, while Captain Stillingfleet stepped out for a moment to issue some order, contrived to scribble something upon them which he, upon taking the packet from her and returning it to his pocket, failed to observe.

What to do with the black man, the one who had assisted the Fleming in their escape from d'Ogeron at Tortuga, also gave her great concern, for that she had promised to transport him back to Guinea she by no means forgot; but the negro, a very intelligent and honest fellow, set her mind at rest upon this score. Coming up to her one day, when they had passed the fishing fleets in the Channel, and were in sight of the white cliffs of Dover, he besought her, with so many manifestations of devotion that she was touched, to take him into her service and let him abide with her in England, that she consented.

"But how comes it, Kololo," for so he called himself, "that you would rather go into England with me than return to your own country?" she asked.

"Me no find my country any more," he answered. "My country move all about," from which she understood that the tribe to which he belonged had no fixed abode, but was nomadic.

"But haven't you a wife in your country, Kololo?" she insisted.

"Me have wife long time—no have wife now," he returned, rolling the whites of his eyes at her so ludicrously that she could not forbear to smile. "Some mans have Kololo's wife now. Kololo get plenty more wifes, one, two, three, maybe. Kololo rich now."

By this he referred to the fact that he had been awarded his share of the spoils, as one of the men before the mast, and indeed, he had proved himself a natural sailor and very nimble in going aloft, even in the roughest weather. Nancy tried to explain to him that people in England had but one wife, but he either would not, or could not understand this. So she gave it over and consented to take him into her service, at which he seemed hugely delighted.

They arrived at length in the Thames on an April afternoon, and came at last to anchor at London.

Then such a stir was created as had not been known in England since good Queen Bess had gone aboard the *Golden Hind* in Plymouth Sound to brave the wrath of Spain and make of Francis Drake a knight, for word of the treasure stowed away in the hold of the *Snapdragon* spread through all the ale-houses and taverns where the men rushed so soon as they could contrive to leave the ship, until at length the story of the Devon girl who had rescued thirty Englishmen from the French in the Indies was the talk of the town, and John Evelyn himself went down, with some of the gentlemen of the Admiralty, to see the British ship they had retaken from the Spaniards, and verify the tales of gold that had reached even the king, and greatly astonished were they to find in command Godfrey Stillingfleet, who had long been given over for dead.

Nothing would do but Mr. Evelyn must carry them straight away to Whitehall, although Nancy would rather far have gone to her cousin Mountford's house, as well to learn news of her father and her old friend Colonel Sidney, as to deliver their message to her kinsman, the importance of which, she feared, had been destroyed by her long absence in the tropics, making the news she bore stale. But they would not hear of this, and so carried her off with them in a coach, waiting only to put the *Snapdragon* under the protection of the customs officers.

CHAPTER XVI

"—AND ALL'S WELL"

CHARLES STUART was not the man to be unmoved by so stirring a tale of adventure, and as Captain Stillingfleet described how Nancy had come to him and the English pirates in the night, in the French Governor's castle on the cliffs of Tortuga, and had called to them in the darkness a message of freedom, the sparkle in his eyes grew more bright and his face beamed.

" 'Tis a pity, Mr. Evelyn," said he, "that we have not such tarpaulins in the fleet as these men who have been fighting our battles below the tropic, else would we have had greater success lately against the Dutch and the Turk. Yet, methinks your favorite theory as to the value of discipline receives a rude blow from this account."

"Nay, sire," replied Mr. Evelyn, whose keen interest in the welfare of his Majesty's navy had made him an authority on all such matters at court, "but does not the fact that it was Master Stillingfleet who took command at a critical juncture, and so brought them off safely with all their booty from that fellow Morgan—who must be a very devil of a captain, an' I misjudge him not, and will be heard from one day to the credit and glory of our arms—does not the fact that Captain Stillingfleet, as a gentleman of the fleet, had been trained to command, but prove the soundness of my contention?"

"It doth seem to me that Captain Stillingfleet did but conduct himself indifferently well, since he assumed command of the—what is the name, it doth please me hugely, ah—the *Snapdragon*, only when the maid had been put out of the combat, as it were," returned the king dryly.

Nancy, accompanied by Godfrey Stillingfleet and the gentlemen of the Admiralty, had arrived at Whitehall to find there the usual gay and dissolute assemblage, so that the Puritan girl, reared as she had been, felt that she would stifle in the fetid atmosphere. In the gallery a great crowd of lords and ladies in all the finery of the period, were at cards or dice, and Nancy had grown suddenly timid as she beheld so many of the women whom she had been taught to regard as creatures of vice and shame, regarding her with ill-concealed astonishment written on their painted cheeks and lifted eyebrows as she was hurried through one of the long corridors toward the king's private apartment.

Charles, toying with a spaniel, was seated at a table looking at a collection of medallions which a goldsmith had spread out before him for his inspection, and his Majesty's interest had been divided at first between the trinkets and the story which Captain Stillingfleet, at the request of Mr. Evelyn, had begun to tell.

But as he progressed, the king's attention was more and more attracted to the slender girl who stood shrinkingly in the shadow of a magnificent cabinet, until now he regarded her with such frank admiration that Nancy, feeling upon her those dark eyes which were never so agreeably occupied as in the inspection of a beautiful woman, suddenly felt herself grow shy and her cheeks to burn.

"And how much treasure have you brought off with you?" he demanded suddenly, when he had surveyed her critically at his leisure from beneath his heavy eyelids.

"We estimate it at 300,000 crowns, my liege," replied Nancy, "but I do not know what the sum will prove to be exactly, until it hath been appraised."

"A goodly fortune," commented his Majesty.

"And would have been larger, but for the lead which we did practically give away to Captain Morgan, a vast quantity of it, sire, which he did agree to take in trade for provisions and other goods, yet cheated us in at the last."

" 'Tis ample, what you have," returned Charles with a grimace. "Would to God it were mine," he added petulantly, "and I warrant I should quickly be rid of this beggarly Parliament that doth trouble me sorely. Nay, Sir Godfrey," he smiled quickly, raising his delicate fingers, while Captain Stillingfleet, overcome by the knighthood that had been so nonchalantly conferred upon him, dropped to his knee and kissed his sovereign's hand, "take me not seriously. I do but jest, nor offer me a share in this treasure, for I will take the will for the deed.

"As for my friend, Don Luis, od's-fish! I can see him now, up to his neck in the jungle, beset by mosquitoes and crocodiles, and what other vermin there be in those parts. Nathless, an' he could not take care of his own, I shall not worry my head about his plight, for he did ever love me best when my purse was fullest, and hath bled me white for the scanty service he did ever render me—nor am I sure he did not come by this English ship by foul means and treachery. And since he is not here to claim the lands in Devonshire I had reserved for him, I dare say I can do no better than by conferring them upon you.

"But believe me," he added, turning to Nancy, "I reward him thus only that through him I may serve you, who have brought such honor to our arms and stimulated our fleet which doth sadly need such inspiration."

With this, the king suddenly took one of Nancy's hands within his own, and placed it in Sir Godfrey's mighty fist, whereat both of them reddened so furiously that the king exclaimed with mock rapture he had never seen the like in Whitehall, and did believe a similar thing had never happened before within those walls, for that they were the first blushes he had observed there.

"NAY, my liege," stammered Captain Stillingfleet, "since she alone is deserving of your Majesty's favors, as most cheerfully and gladly do I admit, I pray you, confer these estates upon her alone."

"What!" cried Charles, leaning back in his chair, a look of astonishment upon his handsome face. "Do you then decline the lady's hand? By God's light! The incident is unique. Never before has it happened—nor would I have believed it could!"

"Sire, 'tis through no fault of my own—the lady is promised to another."

"Ods-fish! Thou art a simpleton, sir. I should make thee Duke of Numskull! Will you tell me to my face that Charles Stuart knows naught of women? This lass hath felt thy kisses and is afire to feel them again, sir. And now, be off with you, and when you go upon your honeymoon you might easily combine business with pleasure by spending it in Paris, where the errand upon which you started thither some months ago still awaits your attention."

"Nay, my liege," burst forth Nancy, "but there is no need now for that."

The king regarded her with amazement, looking in great perplexity from her to Captain Stillingfleet, and then back to her again. At last said he:

"What know you of this business?"

She hung her head and was silent.

"This boy hath been babbling, I'll be bound. What say you now, Mr. Evelyn, of the value of discipline?"

" 'Twas nothing much that he said, sire," said Nancy softly. " 'Twas only a careless word dropped, and would have meant nothing to another. But my liege, I am John Chillingworth's daughter."

The king in his excitement sprang to his feet and stood looking down at her.

"Daughter of John Chillingworth!" he exclaimed. "Daughter to that arch-traitor!"

He fell into a reverie, then threw back his head and laughed that singularly winning Stuart laugh.

"Ods-fish! Solomon was right! Why, here I have gone and conferred upon John Chillingworth's daughter's husband that is to be, the estates which he hath forfeited for his treason."

"Nay, sire," said Godfrey Stillingfleet, blushing furiously and clasping and unclasping his hands nervously, "I fear your Majesty did not understand that I can not accept this gracious gift for reasons—for reasons that make it impossible—the lady, sire, is promised to——"

"As for you, sir!" interrupted the king, as if he had not heard him. "Upon my soul, for a secret mission I would rather trust this cunning maid here than any young blood in Christendom."

Nancy smiled, for the words carried her straight back to the little ledging over the pastry-cook's shop in Lille, and the words that General Sidney had spoken to her father.

"Well, sir," the king was saying, "since I have made over Chillingworth's estates to his daughter, through you, we will have done with this traitor quest, so leave him be in peace, until such time as he shall come to England with his plots and cursed conspiracies."

"Nay, my liege," returned Nancy, making him a courtesy, "but he can return to England as safely as any man, and Algernon Sidney, too, since they have the protection of the king's pardon."

"Pardon!" cried his Majesty. "I know naught of a pardon for either of these regicides."

"Ay," said Nancy, smiling frankly and unabashed into his eyes, so that he was as struck with the freshness and innocence of her youth as with her girlish beauty, "ay, for both of them, sire."

With this she suddenly drew from her bosom the packet of papers she had first taken from the hand of Captain Collier on the *Oxford*, and extending them toward the king, cried:

"See, your Majesty—the royal seal!"

"What means this?" demanded the king, turning the papers over in his hand and addressing himself to Captain Stillingfleet.

"These, sire, be the pardons which were furnished to Captain Collier for such of those English derelicts in the Indies who, needing them, might gain them for some exploit in the service of your Majesty's government. When Captain Collier was killed in the explosion, as I described to you, the papers came into our possession, and having among us many worthy fellows, your devoted subjects, who could not otherwise come back to old England, to the glory and credit of your kingdom, I made bold, sire, knowing full well the purposes for which they had been issued, to use them as you yourself had intended."

"Of that I have no complaint to make," replied Charles. "But since the rebels Chillingworth and Sidney were not among you, how their names appear here above my seal, I can not make out."

"Yet 'tis very simple, my liege," said Nancy.

"Simple!" fretted the king.

"Ay, my liege—I wrote them there myself." Saying which, she assisted the king in unfolding the papers, and pointing to the list of names upon the pardon indicated those of Sidney and Chillingworth among the rest.

"Ods-fish! Am I ever to be thwarted," cried the king. Then the smile came back again to his dark face. "Nathless, and I have put my name upon it, there it shall stand," he said. "So worry not, my child, and send for thy father and his friend when thou wilt, and so they comport themselves as my faithful subjects in the future they will hear naught of me again."

HE TURNED to go, the interview at an end, when his eye caught a glimpse of Jim Rimble's keepsake hung by its string about the girl's neck, and spreading it upon his palm:

"Ods-fish! Mr. Isaacs," said he, "here is a medallion more curious than any in your collection. See, the cross-bones and skull. Some pirate's masterpiece, no doubt."

"Right willingly would I present it to you, my liege," said Nancy, "were it not for the fact that it is a keepsake, given to me by Jim Rimble, the sailor I did tell you of, who hath exacted a promise from me to wear it in his remembrance."

"I recall him—the singing fisherman," laughed the king.

"Ay, that is the one," replied Nancy. "And this was one of his angling sinkers, fashioned rudely into the shape you see it. 'Tis without value, being but a bit of lead—a chip from one of the pigs that Captain Stillingfleet did sell to Captain Morgan for cannon-balls. Yet would I wear it for him."

"Lead, say you!" exclaimed Mr. Isaacs, the goldsmith, who had taken Jim Rimble's keepsake into his hand and had been examining it. "Nay, Mistress Chillingworth, say not so—'tis solid silver, ma'am!"

As they all stood then, looking into one another's faces, the sound of laughter and music came faintly floating to them from the merrymakers in the gallery. Mr. Evelyn was the first to break the silence.

"And you say," said he, "that this piece was chipped from one of the pigs of lead sold to Captain Morgan at Hispaniola?"

Nancy, inarticulate, nodded in assent.

"Sold, and never paid for in any way soever," finished Captain Stillingfleet. "We didn't get a ham!"

The king snorted, a genuine plebeian snort, and turned upon young Stillingfleet a pitying glance.

"And how many hams and shoulders would have recompensed you for this loss, think you? I warrant you 'twould take the fleets of England to fetch them home unless you have as poor a head for commerce as for love."

"And were all the pigs of lead the same?" asked Mr. Isaacs.

"They were all alike," replied the girl.

"How many of them, did you say?"

"A huge number, seven hundred and eighty in all."

Mr. Evelyn took from his pocket a small note-book and crayon, and figuring for a moment:

"My liege," he said, turning to the king, "in all probability Captain Henry Morgan is bombarding Maracaibo at this moment with silver cannon-balls worth upward of 200,000 pounds. An' he take the place, 'twill be the most costly victory ever your Majesty won."

The king shrugged his shoulders and turned to leave, but paused a moment and taking Nancy's hand, raised it to his lips.

"Is there naught else I can do for you, my child?" he asked.

"Well, yes, your Majesty," replied Mistress Chillingworth, feeling for Godfrey Stillingfleet's hand and clasping it in her own. "You might give us your blessing."

"But I thought you were promised to another," smiled Charles, a twinkle in his eye.

"Not to another, my liege," answered the girl, "but to this one, as you did guess, and I did see just now in his eyes a light that makes me bold to speak." Whereat Captain Stillingfleet threw his shoulders back with a gasp, and she felt her fingers crushed in his great palm.

"Bless you both," laughed the king. "And, my boy, when you bring Lady Stillingfleet back to London, do not forget us at Whitehall."

He turned and left them looking into each other's eyes.

The Bullet

By A. Judson Hanna

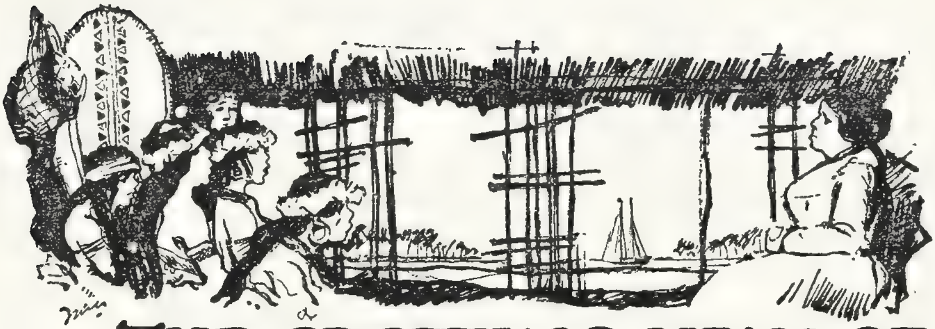
THE little gray death runs everywhere,
Up hill and down in the hollow;
Goes snooping about to spy me out
So swiftly no eye can follow.

The gray little gadder may find me yet;
Gray Sister, I fear you not,
Though your arms are cold and your manners bold,
And your kisses are swift and hot.

She laughs in the grass and sings in the sun,
Or whistles a merry tune.
Before or behind me, or ever you find me,
I crave of you one small boon:

Little gray ghost, come not to me
When my comrades all sleeping lie,
And I walk alone beneath the pale moon—
Not thus, gray ghost, would I die.

Give me one moment of fierce delight
In the vortex of fighting men,
When the brown ranks close in the battle throes—
If you *must* come, come to me then.



THE CROWING HENS OF TOTULU

by J. ALLAN DUNN

Author of "The Gold Lust," "The Island of the Dead," etc.

"NEVER speak to a woman before twelve o'clock, noon. Follow that rule, Jimmy, my lad," said Riley Hardin, "and you'll avoid trouble with the sex. By twelve their blood gets to circulatin' properly and they forget to be peevish."

"Ho, yus," replied Jimmy. "That's a fine hold bit hof a rule, that his. You 'as your dooties on deck, an' w'en you ain't got none you can pretend you 'as, an' she none the wiser. But w'ot price me? My job's below an' she knows hit, an' fair chivvies me hall hover the place till Hi'm barmy. Hi'm sick of hit, Hi tell yer. W'ot did she come haboard for hanyway, that's w'ot Hi'd like to know? W'ot hif she his the skipper's missis. Hi've got shares hin the ship myself."

"She came aboard, Jimmy, my son," replied the first mate," because she preferred the *Margaret Ann* to jail."

"She'll turn the ship hinter a bloomin' loonatic asylum hif she keeps hit hup this w'y, wiv me has chief patient. W'ot was she goin' to get hin jail for? Wimmen's wrongs what they wants made wimmens' rights, I suppose?"

"Well, Jimmy, you know she's had the sufferaging bug bad for a year. She's what we call back in the States a limelighter. Wants to stand in the spot all the time and thinks she's a natural-born leader."

"Hi know hall that. W'ot appened to get the coppers hafter 'er.

"You were out of town, Jimmy. It was a week before we sailed——"

"W'ot did she do? 'Eave 'arf a brick hat a bobby?"

"First," said Hardin, "her limelightin' got her to start a subscription to place a marble monument above the grave of an English sufferagette that had tried to blow up all the poets' and dooks' and warriors' tombs in Westminster Abbey, but had miscalculated the length of the fuse. That fell flat, owin' to the lady who was fightin' her for the leadership of the Sydney Sufferagettes being a sixteenth cousin of the nephew of Nelson, or Byron or some one.

"So then some of 'em got into the gallery at the mayor's banquet and threw a lot of cheap eggs while the soup was being served. One egg was a chiny one and hit the mayor on the bean, so that his bald head looked as if it was tryin' to raise eggs on it's own account. The skipper got the tip that the police knew who chucked it, so we smuggled Mrs. B. aboard and telegraphed you, and the next day we sailed.

"I told the skipper they couldn't prove it on her, because she couldn't possible have aimed it at the mayor and hit him too, but he didn't see the joke."

"Well, Hi'm goin' to tell 'im something hon my hown 'ook. Blowed hif she don't think Hi'm some sort of stooard. Started harrangin' my trade-room shelves. Told me Hi 'adn't got no tyste in dress goods. Me! W'ot 'ave hintrodooced more 'its hin percales hand muslins than hany supercargo hin the South Seas! Said Hi hought to 'ave stocked hup wiv calico wiv lilock sprigs hon hit. Lilock sprigs, for Tamatau's *fahines!*"

"Make allowances, Jimmy. She can't help it. She's a bit of a freak, you know. Most of these sufferagettes are, I reckon. Crowin' hens, I call 'em."

"Crowin' 'ens? She's a bloomin' cuckoo, that's w'ot she his. Crowdin' 'erself hin w'ere she don't belong hand hain't wanted, hand tryin' to shove me hout hof my hown trade-room. Came hin this hafternoon w'en Hi was workin', hand flounced hout becoz Hi was peeled to my hundershirt hand pants. Told the skipper Hi was hindecent, she did. Honly peace Hi 'ave, his w'en she's seasick and, thank Gawd, she turns yeller hevery time the cabin lamp swings hin the gimbals."

"Maybe she'll work it out of her system that way," opined Hardin. "It's largely a matter of bile, to my way of thinkin'."

"Hif hit honly was," said Jimmy, "you could cure h'em heasy. Put h'em hall haboard a rollin' little steamer and send h'em hout hin the Channel somew'eres w'ere hit's nice and choppy. That 'ud beat hall the 'unger strikes. Wouldn't 'ave to feed h'em hat hall."

"What about the ones who wasn't seasick?"

"Make h'em wait hon the rest. They'd 'ave to, hout hof 'umanity. 'Old their 'eads and rush the bowls. Ho! Hi'd cure h'em."

"Well, if it gives you any comfort," said the mate," the glass is down to thirty, and pumpin' at that. There's somethin' comin' our way, and soon. That's why it's so hot."

"Hit his warm," agreed Jimmy, mopping his brow. "H'ill tell Talua to put hon the racks hat supper. She starts feelin' sick the minnit she sees h'em hon the table. 'Ullo, 'ere's the skipper."

"Jimmy," said Captain Boyle, coming aft and speaking a little wearily, "Mrs. Boyle isn't feeling very well. I wish you'd fix her up a little toddy. She thinks it'll make her feel better."

Jimmy glanced at the mate, who averted his eyes. Then he went to the companionway, looking as if he'd like to fiz a draught for the wife of his esteemed skipper that would prove far from being a *nepenthe*.

"Mrs. Boyle under the weather, captain?" asked Hardin solicitously.

"Yes, Hardin, she's a bit nervous yet. And the heat. Glass is still falling—down to twenty-nine-ninety. You'd better shorten sail. We'll be needin' storm canvas before midnight. Monsoon weather.

"I'll handle it," he added as four bells struck; "if you want to go below? It's my watch."

"Never mind, skipper," answered his mate hastily. "I'll stay on deck and 'tend to it. I want to smoke a bit anyway."

The orders given, the two paced the deck together.

"Women," said the captain after a while, "are peculiar, Hardin. Especially these days. They seem to want something out of the ordinary to occupy themselves with."

"What most of 'em need," replied Hardin, "if you don't mind my sayin' so—is kids."

Captain Boyle sighed.

"I guess you're right Hardin," he said. "I guess you're pretty nearly right."

THE next day found the barometer and the thermometer still moving in opposite directions. The sky was filmed with a dull haze through which the sun shone like a tarnished copper wafer. The ocean seemed covered with gray scum. As the bows of the barkentine lunged sullenly through the water, they turned up long swathes of dull, slimy green, like crude oil. The life had gone out of the sea, no foam showed at stem or stern, only a few thick-rinded bubbles that floated out of sight without breaking. The wind slapped suddenly at the scant canvas from every quarter and the barkentine rolled heavily from side to side as if it's timbers had lost their buoyancy.

Mrs. Boyle, fat to the creasing point, her ample form swathed in a Paisley shawl, yet looking somehow shrunken for all her stoutness, with a face the color of fresh putty, appeared on deck, and made her way carefully to the mainmast where she clung feebly.

"I can't stand it below," she said to her spouse. "The heat's awful and there's that Brownbill whistling in his trade-room till my head fair splits with it."

"I wouldn't stay on deck if I were you, my dear," said the captain. "There's goin' to be dirty weather in short order."

"I'll stay here if it kills me," retorted the lady with what in healthier hours would have been temper. "If you had any consideration for me, you'd get me my deck-chair."

"Billy-Boy," called the captain.

"Why can't that Brownbill fetch it?"

"That is hardly his duty, my dear. And he has others."

"Duties?" sniffed the lady sinking into the chair. "He's messin' with a lot of paints down below. Thinks he's an artist. 'Mfff!

"Oh!" as the barkentine lurched suddenly. "Can't you fix the wheel or something and keep the ship even?"

"No, my dear, I can't," said the captain with some acerbity, leaving her to meet his first mate.

"Well," retorted the lady, "as soon as I get my feet on solid ground you'll not get me to sea again in a hurry."

"And that," thought the mate, though he did not speak it, "is the best news this trip."

"Glass twenty-nine-seventy," he said aloud. "Gettin' mighty dark, ain't it?"

The muggy heat seemed to increase as the sky film thickened, shutting off the sun till the day dulled to premature twilight.

Captain Boyle strode back to the chair. "Get below, Maggie," he said.

"I'll not," said the lady, waxen in the dusk.

"You will!" replied her husband, master on his own quarterdeck. "Billy-Boy, help Mrs. Boyle below!"

She went, her handkerchief to her mouth, seemingly corroborating Jimmy's theory of a cure for ultra-suffragitis.

"Can't tell red from bloo below," said the little supercargo, coming on deck.

"Here she comes," announced Boyle suddenly, as the line of the onrushing wind ruled the water with a line of black, throwing forward a skirmish-line of whitecaps.

The storm canvas filled as the breeze strengthened and the barkentine amended her sluggish speed.

"Everything snug, Mr. Hardin?"

"All snug, sir!"

The breeze suddenly turned to a gale that blew momentarily more fiercely till a shout died to a whisper on the lips. Streaks of oily spume sped horizontally across the deck.

"Center's to the east'ard, I think," yelled Boyle into the mate's ear, cupped by his hand. "Stand by to wear ship!"

A minute later the *Margaret Ann* was thrashing toward the horizon where no sunset was to grace the close of that day.

Mrs. Boyle, below in her cabin, recked not of casting votes or addressing applauding sisters. She was not silent, but her eloquence was not that of speech.

* * *

IT WAS a sunny afternoon when the lady ventured on deck once more and evinced a languid but growing interest in the lifting of the coco-palms of Totulu above the horizon.

In her lap, as she reclined in her chair, were two pieces of coarse canvas which she was adorning with colored wools disposed in the patterns of bright red animal-heads with shoe-button eyes, supposed to represent foxes, on a background of sickly green.

"What size shoes did you say King Tamatau wears?" she asked her husband.

"I don't think he ever wore any, my dear."

"Then why didn't you say so?"

"I didn't know what you were making."

"Well, he'll wear these," said the original Margaret Ann of the barkentine's christening, regarding her work with pride. "I got the biggest soles there were in Sydney—fourteens. If they're too small, we can take off the heels and turn back the canvas. Don't you think he'll like them?"

"He ought to," said Boyle diplomatically.

"Hold Tomato hin carpet slippers!" whispered Jimmy to Hardin. "Ho, my heye!"

* * *

THE *Margaret Ann* swung at her moorings in the lagoon of Totulu off the long copra wharf, dipped ensign and fired a royal salute for the monarch of the little atoll-kingdom of which Totulu was the capital.

"When are we going ashore?" demanded Mrs. Boyle, decked for the occasion in white duck skirt, peekaboo-waist, long, white gloves and a wide-brimmed magenta hat with yellow ostrich plumes.

"Not until the king comes off," said Boyle.

"Then get me a fan," said the lady. "I should have brought a sunshade."

"Some by-by doll," murmured Jimmy as he sped Billy-Boy on the errand. "She'll make a 'it wiv Hold Tomato, Hi don't fink."

"Are those *women* rowing?" asked Mrs. Boyle excitedly, as Tamatau's whaleboat, propelled by six lusty queens, shot out from the private wharf.

"Yes'm," replied Hardin. "They do it for exercise. Keeps 'em reduced."

Mrs. Boyle looked sharply at the mate. "Ha!" she said. "Well, it ain't ladylike. I thought they wore clothes?"

Jimmy, addressed thus abruptly, sputtered something about "the 'eat," and retired to the cabin to dispense the inevitable "ginnybeer" for Tamatau.

"She's a startin' of somefing already," he confided to second mate Wilkins as they hastily shared an extra bottle of beer. "She'll be a cuckooin' on Totulu before you can s'y Jack Robinson. You watch."

Tamatau, to whom every year brought more of girth and less of breath, grunted heavily up the sideladder, resplendent in pajamas the design of which seemed to be an impressionistic attempt to portray orange starfish in a purple sea. Puffing, he stood at the rail, gazing fixedly at the vision of Mrs. Boyle. Great drops of perspiration ran down his fat jowls and splashed on the deck, while his enormous head smoked from the exertion of his climb.

"Looks like a meltin' chocklate drop in a tuck-shop winder," said Jimmy, *sotto voce*, to Hardin, as he waited with a huge tankard of beer reinforced with gin. "Look hat 'is lamps buggin' hout at the missis. Like 'ard boiled heggs hin a myonnaze salad."

Still enthralled, the heated monarch stretched an automatic arm for the tankard.

"My wife, King," said Boyle.

Mrs. Boyle curtseyed low.

"After all," she thought, "a king is a king." And made up her mind to be kodaked with him at the earliest moment.

"Humph!" said Tamatu from the depths of the goblet.

Then, relinquishing it to Jimmy for a fresh supply—

"*Momona kela fahine papalangi.*"

"What does he say?" asked Mrs. Boyle smilingly of the captain.

The skipper's embarassment was saved by Hardin.

"He says'm," said the mate, "that you're 'some lady.'" Which was an approximate, if not a literal translation.

The "*momona fahine*" (fat woman) held out a white-gloved hand, none too small, which was engulfed in the sweaty paw of Tamatau. She made another mental note—"To preserve the glove, as trophy Number Two."

"Aren't the ladies coming aboard?" she asked.

"Them?" answered Tamatau. "Ugh! No."

"Mrs. Boyle looked as if she was about to say something which etiquette forbade, and followed the group to the cabin.

There was one question certain to be propounded by Tamatau within five minutes of his boarding either of the two vessels with the captains of which he traded—the barkentine *Margaret Ann*, Captain Boyle, and the schooner *Shamrock*, Captain McShane—both of Sydney. It came after the draining of the monarch's fourth mug.

"What you bring me, kapitani?"

"Ah," said Boyle. "Present this time very fine, King. You remember light-stick Captain McShane give you last year?"

"Umph!" replied Tamatau, who had forborne to slip the switch of the electric torch in question, imagining it a perpetual flame inspired by *papalangi* magic. "That no dam good"—Mrs. Boyle coughed—"two day, light all gone!"

"Well, this is different, King. This is big, oh plenty big light. Can see all around lagoon. I show you tonight. Can burn all time. I show Kokua how to fix."

"Kokua, he dam fool, too. Two, maybe three month now, he break noise-box you bring me last time. Kokua plenty too much dam fool."

This was a real grievance with Tamatau, for the circus orchestrion presented him by Captain Boyle had been a source of delight to all Totulu, until it broke down, to the disgrace of Kokua, general factotum of Tamatau's little atoll-kingdom of Totulu.

"Jimmy can fix that, King," assured Boyle. "I bring you new tunes for that too."

"*Maiti*," said the mollified monarch, as Jimmy handed him his fifth flagon.

"Mrs. Boyle, she bring you something too, King."

Tamatau, whose glance had seldom wandered from the buxom countenance of the skipper's lady, which seemed to hold for him some strange fascination—somewhat to her embarassment, though she set it down as homage due—gazed at her with renewed interest. On her part, she had carefully rehearsed her presentation speech.

"I trust, sire, that they will fit," she said. "If they don't, I can fix 'em."

The king viewed the gift with admiration and thrust one paw in either slipper. But he made no effort to try them on, though the donor was itching to see the working effect of her industry.

"*Maiti,*" he said. "*Maiti!*"

The talk drifted to copra and shell and hawkbill turtle, and presently the monarch rose ponderously from the settee which creaked it's relief.

"I go now," he said. "You come ashore soon, I show *fahine* all my present."

He puffed himself laboriously up the companionway, attended by Boyle, and puffed himself down the sideladder to his waiting whaleboat.

"A most agreeable person," said Mrs. Boyle as the skipper returned to the cabin. "But I wish he wouldn't stare so."

"You have made an impression, my dear. He seldom sees a woman of your style."

As a general rule, compliments from her husband were regarded as a suspicious commodity by Mrs. Boyle, but she accepted this one as currency.

"I shall love to see the things in his storehouse," she said.

The skipper, remembering pictures that had been cajoled from waterfront saloons to catch the robust fancy of Tamatau, hesitated.

"Don't think you'll care for it much," he said.

"The man's respectable, isn't he?"

The use of this adjective in connection with the South Sea ruler was so strange to Boyle that he gasped.

"Oh, Lord, yes. In that way," he answered.

"Then I shall go there first and visit with the ladies afterward."

It was a busy afternoon for the skipper, spent in making arrangements for loading a cargo, and it was close to twilight before he returned to his whaleboat.

"Where's Mrs. Boyle?" he asked of the waiting Jimmy, whose vigil had been beguiled by the company of a slim, golden-skinned, midnight hair-and-eyed young lady of Totulu.

Jimmy had a *na-u* (gardenia) wreath about his neck and the friendship seemed to have passed the first stages. The skipper eyed them sharply, and the girl with a poorly staged attempt at unconsciousness walked off to the village, swinging her lissome hips.

"No philanderin', Jimmy," said Boyle.

" 'Er name's Fuatina," answered Jimmy, dodging the issue.

"I don't care what her name is. I said no philanderin', my son, and I meant it. A friendly interest for the good of trade, but no mix-ups. Where's Mrs. Boyle?"

"She's hover wiv the wimmin in the queenery. Bin there two 'ours hor more. 'Ere she is, now!"

Escorted by a score of queens and lesser ladies, Mrs. Boyle came to the boat requesting to be rowed aboard promptly, as "she was hungry."

"The ladies," she announced later in the privacy of the cabin, "are interesting, but the king is a beast."

"What's wrong?" asked Boyle quickly.

"He took me to that stuffy storehouse of his, filled up with junk like a second-hand shop. There were pictures on the walls that were worse than indecent. I couldn't look anywhere but what I saw one. I think, seeing I am your wife, you might have warned me."

"My dear——"

"But that was nothing! The creature didn't want to show *me* anything. He wanted to look at my teeth."

"Your teeth?"

"I said my teeth, Captain Boyle."

"You must have been mistaken."

"I can read signs as well as the next person, I believe. I tell you he wanted me to open my mouth and let him see my teeth, as if he had been a dentist. But I told him exactly what I thought of him, and though he didn't appear to understand all of it, I don't think he'll care to renew the acquaintance in a hurry. Is supper ready?"

It was. And the lady's teeth were relegated to more pleasant purposes than the amusement of a monarch.

Captain Boyle wisely set aside the subject, resolving to open it later with Tamatau. But the explanation came naturally in the evening.

JIMMY had repaired the worn valves of the orchestrion and the entire population, fixed and visiting, of Totulu and it's lagoon, assembled on the beach to hear the strains—using the word advisedly—of the new records. Mrs. Boyle was the only absentee, having retired early after the excitements of the day. The concert was a grand success, "Come, oh, my hero" being first favorite, with "My Hoolah Boolah Maid" a close second.

But the searchlight made the supreme

hit. With a full supply of carbide in the cylinder, Tamatau delighted in thrusting into unexpected publicity couples who had sought the security of shadows in which to make love. His guffaws of joy came to a sudden end, however, as the beam disclosed his reigning favorite, Fatua, palpably flirting with a stalwart Totuluan in the comparative obscurity of the side of a canoe.

Jimmy created a diversion by starting a new record and the blare and clang of one of Sousa's marches—butchered to make a South Sea holiday—restored the monarch's equanimity. He turned the searchlight on the orchestrion and shouted approval at Jimmy, who grinned in reply.

"Hi," said Tamatau. "Jimmy, you come along here."

The little supercargo came over to where the king and the skipper sat side by side on the sand.

"What you want, King?" he asked.

"I like look um teeth," said Tamatau, pointing to his own substantial masticators.

"My teef?" said Jimmy, wonderingly.

"Sure," said the king, indicating the molars of his massive jowl.

"H'im hon," said Jimmy. "You want um see gold teef."

He opened his mouth in the full ray of the searchlight, while Tamatau ponderously rose, and gazed at the crown-teeth of the supercargo's bridge work.

"*Maiti no,*" he said. Then, to Captain Boyle:

"Your *fahine,* she plenty fine gold tooth."

A light dawned on the skipper.

"Sure, King! Many gold teeth, very fine, cost plenty much money. You like um?"

"I like," said Tamatau. "Where she get?"

"Sydney, King. Where did you get yours Jimmy?"

"Sydney, one side. This side was fixed in Tahiti, three years ago. Old Boileau, the French dentist."

"Tahiti! said the king. Suppose I go Tahiti, you think I can get?"

"Lord, King, you don't need any new teeth," said Boyle.

"I like," persisted Tamatau, evidently enraptured with his new idea of personal decoration. "Suppose you take me along in ship?"

"When?"

"Tomorrow. I pay. I give you pearl—maybe two."

"Now Tamatau had many pearls which even at his reserve prices were bargains. Tahiti was a scant three hundred miles away. Boileau the dentist could probably be persuaded to rush his job as crownmaker to Totulu."

So reflected Boyle, but, wise in the responsibilities of South Sea trade, he warned the king—

"I think, maybe he hurt plenty much, King."

"All same I no give a dam," said Tamatau.

Jack Johnson must have had the same indifference to pain when he ordered his golden smile.

"All right, I look at pearls tomorrow," assented Boyle.

But the bargain did not end with the king. There was Mrs. Boyle to be considered, and that lady, though mollified at the explanation of Tamatau's interest in her teeth—she had thought it connected with a desire to learn her age—was not to be won over to the plan of the trip until she had secured one of the pearls of passage.

"It'll be a nice run," said Boyle. "You'll like Tahiti."

"I am not going!" returned his wife firmly.

"Not going?"

"For three reasons," replied the lady. "After all I suffered on the trip, I intend to stay ashore till my stomach is settled. And I'm not going to be cooped up with that king. Do you know what he did with my slippers? He was wearing them like a Scotch thingumajig."

"Sporran, my dear," said Boyle, remembering Tamatau's display of his latest gift, hung from the girdle of his pajamas.

"Besides," went on the lady, "the queens are very interesting. We have already discovered interests in common."

"I don't see how you get along with them. You don't know the language and few of them can even talk beach-English."

Mrs. Boyle regarded her husband with scorn.

"Women have no trouble understanding each other," she answered. "We got along very well yesterday," she concluded complacently, remembering the pleasant afternoon on which she had been the star of the reception.

Certain subjects of burning feminine interest had been inevitably left out. The questions of servants, of dressmaking and favorite salads, were naturally *terra incognita* to the Totuluans; but there had been the important matters of sickness to discuss, of patent medicines and the proper handling of husbands, that had all gone swimmingly, despite the lack of mutual vocabulary. Also, Mrs. Boyle had discovered a sad state of affairs concerning Women's Rights in the despotic little monarchy which she had already determined to alleviate. But of this she said nothing.

"Well," said the skipper, "if you've set your mind on staying, it can be arranged. I'll leave Jimmy with you."

"That sparrow! I can take care of myself."

"There's no question of that, my dear. They are perfectly friendly natives. It's a matter of your own dignity. Besides, Jimmy has work to do, getting the cargo ready."

"As long as he attends to his own business?"

"We'll fix him up a tent. As for your quarters——"

"I shall sleep in the Queen-House."

Visions of Mrs. Boyle—who was fond of her comfort—trying to sleep in a grass house open to the four winds and wandering insects, on a mat bed with a wooden pillow, surrounded by a score of queens, half of whom were obese and given to snoring; flashed across the skipper's mind.

"You wouldn't like that, my dear. Those grass houses are full of spiders—and centipedes."

"Ugh!"

"I'll have a proper bed fixed for you in the king's storehouse—we'll take out the pictures. There's a high fence on three sides and the lagoon in front. Besides, it's practically *tapu*. You'll need privacy."

"We-e-ell," said Mrs. Boyle, her flesh still crawling at thoughts of marauding spiders. "Perhaps that's the best thing to do."

"That's settled then. I'll go talk with Jimmy."

THE *Margaret Ann* left on the afternoon tide, with Tamatau, accompanied by the repentant Fatua—under discipline—ensconced in state upon the after deck. The orchestrion sobbed out "The Wearing of the Green" as a farewell lament, and the village, in canoes and afoot along the curving beaches of the lagoon, accompanied the barkentine to the reef-passage. Mrs. Boyle was in the king's whaleboat, manned, at her insistence, by men instead of it's regular crew of queens.

Jimmy had proved less difficult over the matter of staying behind than Boyle had feared. The work the skipper had mentioned was largely hypothetical until the barkentine returned; and the supercargo had six unused canvases and a new outfit of oils and brushes. Besides, there was Fuatina. Mrs. Boyle's quarters had been established to her satisfaction and Jimmy had a tent, improvised from a spare awning by Billy-Boy, set up on the beach away from the village.

The first two days passed quietly. Mrs. Boyle was in constant companionship with the select female society of the atoll, save when she was taking lessons in Totuluan from Kokua, who had acquired a fair knowledge of English on whaling voyages.

Jimmy was working hard on a canvas at a general picture of the head of the muleshoe-shaped lagoon. Fuatina, adoring at his feet, held the spare brushes.

"Hits 'ell, getting this sand right," complained the artist, squeezing prodigally from fat tubes. "Hit looks w'ite, but hit hain't, w'en you see the foam. Hit's pink, hand yeller, hand the shadders his bloo."

A long cobalt shadow fell across the canvas from behind. Atupa, honorary paymaster of Totulu, spoke his approbation.

"*Maiti*, no," he said.

"You like?" asked the flattered artist.

"*Maiti*. Coco-palm plenty much good. All same walk about in wind. I like you make um *pikitura* my house."

"This paint, this canvas, cost plenty much money," said the astute little supercargo—Atupa had pearls. "This picture I sell um Sydney stop along."

"How much?"

"Maybe one hundred dollars."

Atupa mused.

"You take um pearl?"

"Hi'll look hem hover. W'ere's the 'ouse?"

The home of Atupa was on the windward side of the atoll in a clump of glossy breadfruits with the tumbling Pacific beyond. Both the view and a fine pearl stimulated Jimmy's ambition, and with the spellbound Fuatina as official assistant, he started work the next day. In the afternoon Atupa came to overlook the satisfactory progress. Jimmy's palette stopped mostly at secondary hues, but the result was academic to Atupa and he said so.

"That fool *fahine papalangi*," he said presently, as Jimmy shared with him beer from his private stock," plenty soon she make heap *pirikia*."

"What kind of trouble?"

"Oh too much *pirikia*. She speak men no good, women too much plenty good. She speak she think pretty soon men do all work. Women no work. *Fahines* they just sit along all time. Dam fool."

"Startin' the bloomin' cuckoo racket," said Jimmy.

But it was not his rôle to condemn the skipper's lady.

"Hit's just 'er talk," he commented.

Atupa's anticipation of trouble was shortly confirmed. First came Kokua that evening, complaining bitterly.

"That *kapitani fahine*," said the concert-master and handyman of Totulu, "she all same crazy. She speak *fahines* no cook um, no work in taro patch, no fix um copra, no pick um pearl, no work um turtle-shell."

Jimmy turned to the lustrus-eyed Fuatina, never far away.

"Sure Kimo (Jimmy)," she corroborated. "Tonight plenty *fahine* no cook. Tomorrow they no work in copra shed. That *fahine papalangi* tongue plenty too much walk about."

"Well Hi'm not goin' to butt hin," announced Jimmy. "Hit's hup to the skipper hand Hold Tomato."

Next morning the men of the village gathered in groups instead of going fishing or working at their nets, volubly discussing the matter. They had had to cook their own breakfasts, Atupa said, and the women had refused to pound *poi*.

Jimmy was putting the finishing touches to the sketch of Atupa's house when Mrs. Boyle, tagged by a bodyguard of Amazons, obviously excited, appeared with a request that was a demand.

"I want you to paint a sign," she said.

"Who? Me? Hi'm no 'and hat letterin'," lied Jimmy.

"Then let me have some paint and a brush and I'll do it myself," said the lady, picking up a big tube of ebony black and taking the largest brush from Fuatina's helpless hands.

" 'Ere, Hi s'y, Hi need that," demurred Jimmy.

"You can settle with the captain," returned the triumphant Mrs. Boyle, conscious of scoring, amid the giggles of the women. "Do you know where there's a hammer and nails?"

"Hi do not," he replied sulkily.

"Plenty *hamma*, plenty *naili* in storehouse," announced one of the older women, whose sleeveless garment of black and orange stripes projected in front like an awning, by reason of high living.

Jimmy went on painting, but his heart was not in it and he mussed viciously at the shadows.

WORK for women, in the apparent opinion of Mrs. Boyle, was only harmful when applied to the needs of the other sex, for in the next two days of ample evidences of hard labor on the part Totuluan femininity were plainly to be seen.

A scrambling fence of barbed wire—bought by Tamatau to keep the pigs out of his plantations—was stapled from tree to tree, zigzag across the widest point of the atoll. Bruised thumbs and scratched hands were much in evidence amongst the women, and glowering astonishment showed on the faces of the men who had been firmly advised to keep on one side of the crude, but effective *trocha*.

Jimmy, intent upon keeping out of trouble, stayed close to his own strip of beach, watching things develop. He watched with amusement the attempts of the island *fahines*, under the superintendence of the Woman's Champion—late of Sydney—to stretch a banner of white cloth between the two flagpoles in front of the storehouse. Presently it was fixed and the group of militants stepped back to admire.

Jimmy and Fuatina got into their canoe and paddled into the neutral waters of the lagoon for a closer inspection.

VOTES FOR WOMEN

So read the challenge, somewhat marred in effect by the crowding of the last letter against the edge of the cloth.

"And what have you got to say about it?" asked Mrs. Boyle aggressively, advancing to the edge of the lagoon.

Jimmy grinned.

"Hit's a fine job," he said—adding, "Hi don't fink," under his breath— "Honly w'ots the huse? They hain't no votin' hon Totulu. Tamatau's the boss."

"*Was* the boss," corrected the flushed suffragette. And there *will* be votes. If the men have never voted, the way is clearer. For once the better sex shall come into their rights, without having to wrest them from the men. These long wronged sisters"—she indicated the huddle of complacent women—"shall see the dawn of a new day. Here in the South Seas the banner of militancy shall be flung abroad for all the world to see!

"Here, where the spirit of rebellion is rampant, these vigorous Amazons shall establish the true kingdom of feminity. Here——"

"Ho, 'ave hit your hown w'y," said Jimmy as he backpaddled from the shallows. "Just you bloomin' well wait huntil the king and the skipper come 'ome. That's hall."

"What do you fink hof hit?" he asked Fuatina when Mrs. Boyle's harangue had become an echo. "You no want work hany more?"

"*Fahine* —— fool," said Fuatina conclusively. "Suppose we go along now, I cook you fine supper."

THE *Margaret Ann* came in next day to a divided reception. The men, who had pre-empted the canoes, met the barkentine at the reef-passage and clambered aboard before the anchor was down. The women were ranged in a phalanx beneath the banner of their slogan.

"What's all this fool business?" demanded Boyle of his supercargo, who was first to gain the deck.

"You can read hit, carn't yer?" said Jimmy. "Votes fer Wimmin. The missis 'as broke hout hagain, that's hall."

"And what kind of muck have you got inside your head, not to stop it?" asked his exasperated skipper.

"Hi didn't get no lessons hon 'ow to 'andle hit hin Sydney," retorted Jimmy.

His skipper subsided and turned to meet Tamatau, already apprised of the state of affairs, and raging. His face was muddy purple, his eyes congested, the veins of his neck ready to burst. The golden teeth, acquired at much sacrifice of pain and pearls, showed in a threatening grin.

"I fix it —— plenty quick," he announced. "You come along, *kapitani!*"

The ladder was rigged and the furious monarch descended with Captain Boyle into a hastily lowered whaleboat, urged swiftly toward the shore under the stroking of Billy-Boy.

The rank and file of the South Sea suffragettes faltered as the boat approached the storehouse, wavered again and shrank into the shelter of the trees as Tamatau bellowed a torrent of fluent Totuluan invective. Only their leader stood her ground, pale and trembly, but determined.

Tamatu strode ashore, grinding his golden crowns together as he passed her with a glare of apoplectic wrath.

The leader of the vanished legion turned to her husband but found in his stern countenance neither comfort nor opportunity for argument. She sniffed indignantly in the grinning faces of the whaleboat's crew, now backed by the canoes of the Totuluan men, and followed her recreant recruits in their retreat.

In the late afternoon Fuatina brought a note to Jimmy, addressed to Captain Boyle, which the supercargo delivered to his skipper, still closeted with Tamatau inside the storehouse.

The skipper read it hurriedly and crammed it into his pocket.

"Get that truck out of here, Jimmy," he ordered, pointing out the bed that had been arranged for his wife. "Have Billy-Boy take it to the Queen-House. Mrs. Boyle is not going aboard tonight. That makes everything all right, King," he added.

"Sure," said Tamatau.

His complexion had resumed it's natural chocolate and the expensive golden smile was now expansively amiable. A group of empty bottles explained the nature of the emollient.

"I'm going to try the king's idea, Jimmy," said Boyle. "It's a good one. Can't kill, and it may cure."

"Jimmy, you take um drink?" invited Tamatau.

"Here's the scheme," went on the skipper, while Jimmy swigged at his glass. "The announcement is that men are unnecessary. We are goin' to put it up to them to prove it. Ebb runs till midnight or a little later. Every man-jack on Totulu will be aboard, quietly, and we'll take a little trip and let the ladies try it out."

"Fine," said Jimmy. "W'ere do we go?"

"You don't go at all. You stay here."

"W'y?"

"Because I'm not goin' to leave Mrs.

Boyle alone on the island. This isn't a pleasant remedy and you've got to help me apply it. Besides, when things shape as I think they will, I'll want you to send word. We're going to Uafotu atoll. It's scant seven miles due southwest. But you're not to know where we've gone."

"Hi'm hon," replied Jimmy. "But Hi don't see w'y Hi should be picked hout."

"I'll make it right with you."

"Hany hanswer to the note?"

Captain Boyle considered.

"No. I guess not. Let it work itself out. Send Hardin to me and help round up the men."

A little after midnight, the moon sunk, the starset lagoon ruffled by the last of the ebb, the *Margaret Ann*, lightless, slipped her cable, and, under headsails and mizzen, two whaleboats ahead to help steerage in the scant breeze; sneaked away from the unsuspecting village where the women, braced anew by the arguments of Mrs. Boyle against desertion at the first issue, slept after the turmoil of the day.

Clear of the reef, the boats were called in, sail made and yards braced, and the barkentine was wafted silently on the light wind toward Uafotu, leaving the atoll manless, save for Jimmy—whose martyrdom held it's ministering angel in Fuatina, the only unconverted *fahine* on Totulu.

IT WAS the third day of the reign of women on Totulu. The banner still flaunted it's solgan between the flagpoles, the ensign of Margaret Ann, regnant; and that lady still maintained a dominance that was, however, beginning to show signs of internal dissension.

Fuatina supplied Jimmy with a service of verbal bulletins.

"*Pirikia* plenty soon I think," she reported. "Coconuts all gone and only young *fahine* can climb um tree. Young *fahine* mad along *huapala* (sweetheart) all gone. *Fahine* not very good catch um fish. No *musika*, no *hula*. Plenty *pirikia*."

It was even so. Mrs. Boyle was up against it. She was fighting primeval instinct that her own veneer of civilization prevented her from understanding. In the South Seas—and elsewhere—such instinct is divided into two parts, Sex and Stomach. Stomach had already set up it's complaint and Sex was realizing it's lack.

The twenty odd queens, having but one man between them, remained fairly loyal to the new principles. But there were babies in Totulu who wanted their daddies, wives who craved their husbands and providers. There were disconsolate sweethearts. There were younger maidens who were still angling in the delightful waters of flirtation where many fish swam and there were grand prizes for the lucky and skilful.

Kokua no longer played ravishing tunes on the noise-box and Kimo wouldn't, or couldn't—being as a man, *anathema* in the eyes of their leader. There was therefore no more singing, or dancing, or swimming in the lagoon with lusty male partners while the noise-box gurgled and clanged and hooted more or less melodiously. There were no more laughing exploits on the reef—with the same male comrades—with torches to spear for pool-fish when the nights were too warm and far too fair for sleeping.

The first row started over the lack of coconuts. Water was comparatively scarce on the atoll and seldom used for drinking—not to be compared with the milky, bubbling juice of young nuts, gathered at dawn and kept cool beneath banana leaves. The younger women, peeved at the lack of love-making facilities, balked at furnishing the supply for the whole crowd and climbed only for themselves. The maturer women with children, began to draw apart in groups. This *fahine papalangi*, they learned, had no children. "What was she to advise the mothers of men-babes?" The elders, who preferred gin and beer to coconuts, and sometimes got them when a ship was in the lagoon and their men were kind, grumbled among themselves.

Mrs. Boyle noted the symptoms of defection, but she could not prescribe for them. She was conscious of growing a little tired herself of her most faithful satellites, the queens. Curiosity, she realized had been the chief link between them, and that was getting rusty. She wondered where the barkentine was, and fought a constant temptation to question Jimmy, whom she had herself placed beyond the pale.

Sex and Stomach began to assert themselves in her, also. The captain was far oftener in her thoughts than he had been for many a month, and she remembered all sorts of good qualities he possessed that long custom had dusted with non-appreciation. She craved the delicacies set on the shelves of the *Margaret Ann's* pantry for her especial benefit. *Poi* and dried fish appealed less at every meal.

The storm burst on the fifth day. Jimmy was struggling with his third canvas in which the ever-troublesome sand persisted on looking more like snow, or powdered sugar. Fuatina was broiling some mullet they had speared together, and two bottles of beer were safely moored in the lagoon close by.

The skipper's lady, ploughing through the sand far faster than the lines of her build intended she should, received the whiffs of the savory fish in her nostrils as the kneeling camel does the last straw. Two tears started from her eyes and rolled slowly down her flushed cheeks.

"Oh Jimmy," she gasped. "They're drunk."

"Who's drunk?" asked Jimmy, glancing involuntarily toward the beer.

"The queens. All of the women, for all I know. They've been brewing some of that awful stuff all morning—*lava*, I think."

"*Kawa*," amended Jimmy.

"Whatever it is," said the lady, more tears following the first. "And—and they said I was only a *hapa-fahine* (half-woman) because—because I had no babies!"

Jimmy was standing by this time and Mrs. Boyle literally fell into his arms, a proceeding that—as she outweighed the little Cockney by some seventy pounds—was trying to the latter's balance and dignity.

" 'Ere now," he said, bracing himself with wide planted legs. " 'Ere now, you sit down hand 'ave a bit hof mullet wiv me. Hand a bottle hof beer," he added generously. "Fuatina, you cut halong hand find hout what's hup. Then come back to the storehouse. Hi'll paddle the lydy hover."

The astonished Fuatina, hungry despite her lovesickness, cast a reluctant glance at the mullet and sped on the errand of her heart's lord.

It was dusk, and an hour later before she came back, her eyes circling with news.

"I tell you, Kimo," she announced breathlessly. "My word, plenty *pirikia* walkabout quick along her. Pretty soon they too drunk, get plenty mad. They speak *fahine papalangi* no good. They speak she *tahunga* (witch). I think, soon they come along find her."

"Hi s'y, you know, this his a bit hof a muck," said Jimmy. "You go back, Fuatina, and all same watch out. Suppose trouble he start walk along you come back here plenty quick.

"You're safe 'ere'm' ", he assured the frightened woman. "There's a 'igh fence hon three sides hand we can put some barbed wire halong the front to keep h'em hout, hif they start to get fresh. Hi wish Hi 'ad a gun!"

"You don't think they really mean any harm, do you?" asked the now alarmed lady.

Jimmy was humane—as his sharing of his fish and beer testified—but he was also human, and the recollection of his treatment by his skipper's wife during the voyage still held it's smart. He had no idea that there was any real danger and he decided that he might help, as his skipper had suggested, apply the remedy.

"Carn't s'y," he said. "No tellin' w'ot they'll do w'en they get properly tight."

"They aren't"—the voice of the militant faltered—"they aren't cannibals, are they?"

"Not lytely, not has Hi've 'eard hof. Hof course they was hall kai-kanaks once."

"Jimmy, do you know where Captain Boyle is?"

"W'y——"

The conversation was broken abruptly by howls from the direction of the Queen-House. Mrs. Boyle shuddered and shrank back as Fuatina darted around the fence.

"They walk along plenty quick," she panted. "Pretty soon all *kawa* gone, they come."

"What you think they do?" asked Jimmy.

"I think they try kill um *fahine papalangi*," said the girl, in evident earnest.

Another burst of yells added sincerity to her statement and spurred the little supercargo to instant action.

" 'Ere," he said. "Fuatina, you catch wire back there on *lanai*. Mrs. Boyle you scare hup the 'ammer hand staples. You know where to find h'em?"

"Yes, thank God!" tremulously replied the disavowed leader. "I'll get them."

Swiftly a barrier was thrown across from fence to fence and stapled to the flag-poles beneath the discredited banner. They ran strand after strand across, the women feverishly helping with bleeding hands while the supercargo plied the hammer.

"They'll 'ave one 'ell hof a time gettin' through that," he announced at last. "Did they s'y w'ot they laid hout to do, Fuatina?"

"They speak they fix um *fahine* along post by reef. Suppose ship he come along next time, she all right. Ship no come, she *mate*—die.

Jimmy glanced at Mrs. Boyle, but she had retreated to the veranda.

" 'Ell," he said. "You think they mean hit. Sure will do?"

"Sure, Kimo! They plenty drunk, plenty mad."

"Lokke 'ere Fuatina," said Jimmy prying out some staples. "You climb um through here, you run along canoe and go fast to Uafotu, plenty quick you paddle. You speak Kapitani Boyle, you speak Tamatau, they come quick!"

The girl slipped between the strands and was gone in the shadows. Jimmy could hear her swift feet lightly padding on the sand as he started to refasten the staples.

"My Gawd!" he said, half to himself. "Hif Hi honly 'ad a gun!"

"There's one in the storehouse," said Mrs. Boyle. "Where's the girl gone?"

"Gone to get 'elp," said Jimmy tersely. "Where's the gun?"

"It's a shotgun," said Mrs. Boyle, shivering as the drunken yells sounded from beyond the fence. "But I don't think it's loaded. It's on the wall."

"To 'ell wiv the load," said Jimmy. "Git hit. Hi'll bluff h'em. H'im goin' to start the searchlight."

He found fresh carbide and charged the lamp.

"Not a drop hof water in the bloody shop," he announced presently. " 'And me that bottle hof gin. Hit may work."

As the spluttering burner broke into a spasmodic flame, it seemed to wrench forcibly from the darkness the leaders of a rabble of women with wildly rolling bloodshot eyes and dishevelled hair, streaming round the corner of the fence.

"You keep back hout hof sight," commanded Jimmy to Mrs. Boyle. " 'And me the gun!"

"Now then," he cried, as the frenzied savages shrank back from the barbs of the wire, "W'ot do yer want?"

"*Eyah!*" shrilled the dusky harridans, "*Eyah! kela fahine papalangi!*"

The front rank, thrust against the torturing strands, extricated themselves with bleeding hands and torn garments, only to be jammed against the wires once more by the rest.

"*Eyah!*"

Jimmy held the barrels of the empty shotgun where the searchlight shone on the barrels.

"You cut your luckies hout hof this," he shouted, "Helse Hi shoot. Fuatina she go fetch Tamatau—come along plenty quick. Chuck hit now, I tell yer. Hall of yer!"

MRS. BOYLE, cowering on the veranda, looked fearfully at the howling mob, their mouths slavering, hands clutching between the wires, vivid in the strong but uncertain ray of the sputtering lamp that threatened instant darkness as it choked on the mixture of carbide and squareface.

"You git back w'ere you belong now, Hi tell yer," repeated Jimmy. "Hi, you Tiarau!" He singled out a gaunt old hag with a frizzly mop of gray hair above her leathery face, wrinkled by time and her own passions till it looked like the leather of an imitation alligator-skin bag.

Her mouth, horny-lipped, held two yellow tusks in the thrust-forward lower jaw. Her face was like that of a giant lizard. She was an ancient of ancients, the oldest living being on Totulu, an aunt of Tamatau's, accredited with powers of witchcraft and *puri a'naana*—praying to death.

"You, Tiarau," said Jimmy, speaking in Totuluan, with a Hoxton, London, England, accent, "Tamatau will be here with the captain right away. You make these foolish women go home."

"*E-yah,*" snarled the crone in her own language. "This white woman is a witch and she has set her spells upon our men as she did upon us. Only with us, being women, her magic could not last. You say the men will come back. I have known white people to lie. How do we know they will come back? I tell you if they do not come on the intide, the white witch shall die! For, at the outtide, we women of Totulu, whom she bewitched, will set her out by the reef to work her spells and bring back the men, or she shall surely die."

In the vindictive attack of the hag's speech, Jimmy could glimpse a picture of sharks coming in with the rising tide at dawn, swirling through the gray sea and tearing at something tied to a stake. The affair was grim. The little civilization these Totuluan women had acquired, had been stripped from them as they might have tossed aside a garment. They were jungle-folk now, clamoring for their mates.

"Some of you will die first," he answered, menacing with the useless barrels.

"Let it be so! Yet shall the white witch die, unelss the men come with the intide. We will go now until the outtide flows. Then we will come with fire and burn down the fence."

Tiarau turned to the mob and spoke rapidly to them. There were yells of assenting "*Ais*" in reply and they withdrew, savage face after savage face appearing in the dying ray of the searchlight and vanishing into the blackness.

Jimmy drew a long breath. It was up to Fuatina now.

"Hif Hi could honly find some cartridges," he muttered, as he entered the storehouse.

Mrs. Boyle spoke from the darkness.

"What did they say?" she whimpered.

"Nothing much," answered Jimmy. "They've gone now." He scratched a match and lit a cabin-lamp that hung from a rafter.

"Are they coming back? Are they going to kill us, Jimmy?"

"Not hif Hi can find some cartridges," he said, pawing over the junk in the big room. "Hi suppose Hold Tomato's fired h'em hall hoff long hago."

"Don't you worry," he told the frightened woman. "They hain't goin' to do nuffin' till the hebb. That don't start huntil habout heleven, hand I think they'll wait till the tide's nearly hout."

"What time is it now?"

"Close hon to nine." He consulted his wrist-watch. "Hit'll be hall right. Don't you worry. Fuatina can make hit hin a little hover a hour. Thye'll come back a kitin' hin the whaleboats. Hought to be 'ere by ten."

"May I have your watch, Jimmy?"

Jimmy looked round the room. He needed the watch himself to check the anxious minutes.

"Hi!" he said, his eyes catching what they looked for. " 'Ere's a clock. Hi'll wind hit hup."

He turned the clicking key and set the hands. As he stepped down a little door flipped open above the dial and a wooden bird jerked forward while a throaty cry sounded nine times.

"What's that?" nervously exclaimed Mrs. Boyle.

"Hit's a cuckoo-clock," explained Jimmy. "A cuckoo," he went on, "his a Hinglish bird w'ot's halways buttin' hin w'ere hit hain't wanted. Mostly the 'ens, I reckon."

If Mrs. Boyle caught any personal allusion she was too far gone to resent it. She shrank, as far as her figure would allow her, into one of Tamatau's roomy upholstered chairs, and moaned feebly.

"Not a bloody cartridge," announced Jimmy. "Hand that —— light's gone hout."

He went outside to tinker hopelessly with the caked carbide.

The ridiculous wooden bird clucked at it's appointed intervals until the hands pointed to half-past ten.

Jimmy, on nervous watch outside, heard a growing murmur from the village and saw a glow from behind the rear fence that spoke of advancing torches.

"Gawd!" he exclaimed under his breath. "This his too bloody close to be hamusin'. Ho, for just one load hof number twelve! Gawd!"

The murmurs died away and he could hear the woman moaning in the storehouse.

A flaring palm branch was tossed over the fence, followed by another. A little flame licked through the angle of the stockade and the dry posts began to crackle, while triumphant howls sounded from the frenzied Totuluans.

The cries suddenly merged with, then were drowned by deeper tones, among which the exultant Jimmy recognized the voices of his captain and of young Wilkins, the second mate.

" 'Ooray! Won hin the larst lap! Come hon hout, Mrs. Boyle, hit's hall right." And he pried at the staples of the improvised fence.

"Take me away, Jerry lad, take me away," pleaded Mrs. Boyle, sobbing in her husband's arms.

"Sure, my dear," he comforted. "Sure! The ship can't get in against the ebb. Tide'll run for six hours. But we'll go in the mornin' to Tahiti and rest up a bit at the *hôtel L'Égalité.* We came in the boats. There's another comin'. Tamatau's in it. There, there, *acushla,* it's all right, it's all right!"

Kokua, who had been working over the searchlight, succeeded, and the ray swept the lagoon. Jimmy and Fuatina had disappeared. All about stood the once more friendly women with those of their men who had come in the first boat. The disappointed ones grouped together like human candelabra, holding aloft the torches they had intended to use in burning the stockade. The fire had been smothered with sand.

A shout went up as the searchlight picked up the second whaleboat, working along close to shore in the slack of the tide. In the stern, Tamatau urged on the rowers. The queens, fearing wrath to come, sneaked away to their quarters.

Then, from where Jimmy and Fuatina had disappeared, came the sobbing toots of the orchestrion, with bang and clash of it's drum and triangle attachments. Jimmy had selected unerringly the proper record.

"Come! COME! CO-O-Ome, oh, my He-e-ro, Come! COME! CO-OME!" sounded through the night.

"JIMMY," said his skipper, as they strolled along the waterfront at Tahiti, two days later, "Mrs. Boyle and myself will stay here at the hotel, while Mr. Manners takes back the *Margaret Ann* for cargo. You'll go with him, of course.

"I want to get a present of some sort for the missis," he continued. "She's still pretty badly upset and I want to make it up to her someway. What do you suggest?"

The present was really an exchange for a promise given by the thoroughly subdued lady to leave the question of Women's Rights in other hands.

"Lesable's got some noo joolry," said Jimmy. "Nuffin like a bit hof bright stuff to please the lydies. H'ill look haround. Hi want to pick hout somefing myself."

"Fuatina?" quizzed his skipper. "That's a good idea, Jimmy. She deserves it. She saved the situation. And I take back what I said about philanderin'. I'll get her something myself."

"Hand Hi'll make Mrs. Boyle a present," said Jimmy. "Lesable's got some fine cuckoo-clocks. Hi'll buy 'er one hof them."

"A cuckoo-clock? What on earth for? She's got plenty of clocks at home."

"Ho, just for a sooveneer," said Jimmy. "Hit'll remind 'er of kings. There was a cuckoo-clock in Hold Tomato's storehouse. Hit'll remind me, too, w'en Hi come hup to the 'ouse for dinner."

DORY-MATES

by FREDERICK WILLIAM WALLACE

Author of "In the Bank Fog," "Winter Fishing," etc.

IT'S a strange fact that two such diametrically opposed feelings as love and hate are often engendered by each other. The blackest and most diabolical crimes have been committed through love—love of a woman oftentimes—and, peculiar as it may seem, between the two passions there is but a slight barrier, and a human being can change from one to the other almost instantaneously. Without moralizing further, here is a tale of two strong men and a woman—a tale in which the two emotions led to strange happenings.

Elsie Conover was the daughter of a small farmer who owned a place on the shores of

Anchorville Bay. Elsie was pretty, vivacious and something of a flirt—so much so that by the time she was twenty-one she had played serious havoc with the hearts of most of the young farmers, fishermen and sailors of Anchorville County. An impartial critic, endowed with the faculty of reading Miss Conover's mind, would have characterized the pretty, brown-eyed young woman as being shallow and heartless.

Tom Anderson and Westley Collins were young sprigs of Anchorville fishermen—both of them smart trawlers and able men in a dory. Tom was intelligent, quick-witted, a bit of a dandy and a good talker. As fishermen would say, "He had a way with the women" which made him attractive in their sight. He had a pleasant manner, the art of concealing his feelings, and was universally known as a good shipmate.

Westley Collins was the opposite. Though smart enough aboard of a vessel, yet he was slow and clumsy when ashore. He dressed anyhow, walked with a shambling slouch, and conversationally was neither brilliant nor edifying. Though slow of speech and apparently surly, he was big-hearted and kind.

Among the young fellows of Anchorville Elsie Conover was known as Tommy Anderson's girl. Tommy went boat-fishing all one Summer and employed most of his time ashore in laying siege to Elsie's heart. He appeared to be the "white-haired boy" until big, blundering West Collins came home after a long salt-fishing trip and unintentionally "horned in" on Tommy's preserves.

Westley had drawn a big share out of a "high line" trip, and in all probability it was the size of his bank-roll which made him attractive in Elsie's eyes. At any rate, the roll gave the girl the means of a good time until the Fall fishing season came around and Westley began to talk of going to sea again.

"Will ye marry me, Elsie?" he blurted out one night in tones which contained more emotion than the girl had ever thought him capable of.

Having anticipated such a question for some time past, Miss Conover had carefully considered it.

"I—I don't know, Westley," she faltered, dropping her eyes. "I—I'd want to think it over."

"So ye kin, sweetheart," said Westley slowly, "but maybe ye'll give me somethin' to go upon? Kin I hope?"

The girl turned her head away as if thinking. After a pause, she looked up and spoke:

"Ask me again in the Spring, Westley. Save your money and ask me then."

"Are my chances good?" asked the other almost fearfully.

The girl made no reply, but stared at the toe of her shoe.

"Thar ain't no one else, is there, girlie?" he questioned anxiously.

"N—no! There's nobody else."

"Then I might be safe in thinkin' you'll say 'yes' in th' Spring?"

He did not wait for an answer, but slipped his arm around her shoulders and drew her to him.

"Gimme a kiss, girlie!" he murmured, and, unresisting, her face turned to his.

After the embrace, she rose to her feet and held out her hand.

"You must go now, Westley," she said calmly.

"Until the Spring, sweetheart," he said. "I'm going across to Gloucester tomorrow to join a vessel for the Winter haddockin' and I'll come back 'long towards the end o' March. Wish me good-luck an' high-line trips, dearie, and—and another kiss."

When the big fisherman strode happily away, Elsie Conover drew her hand sharply across her mouth.

"The big fool!" she murmured callously. "Me marry him! Ugh!" She shuddered. "He'll be telling Jack Hooper about it, and Jack will be sure to tell Tom Anderson. Maybe Tom will get jealous when he hears that West Collins is cutting him out and he'll keep away from that doll-faced Jennie Hooper and come to me again. Marry West Collins in the Spring? I don't think!" And with a crafty smile she went upstairs to bed.

IN company with a crowd of other Nova Scotia deep-sea fishermen, West Collins went over to Boston and thence to Gloucester, where he got a "chance" with Captain Tim Davidson in the schooner *Seldovia*, fitting out for Winter haddocking. It so happened that Tom Anderson arrived in Gloucester two days later and broached the *Seldovia's* skipper for a place with his gang.

"I cal'late I kin give ye a sight," said the fishing skipper. "Thar's a Novy named Collins what's lookin' for a dory-mate. Maybe you know him? Comes from Anchorville."

"Collins? West Collins?" grunted Anderson with a savage look in his eyes. "I'll be —— ef I'd go dory-mates with that skunk." To himself he muttered! "*Him*—of all men."

Captain Davidson shrugged his shoulders. "Don't matter," he said. "Plenty o' men lookin' for chances these days. Collins'll git a dory-mate 'thout much trouble. I cal'lated, seein' you two was from th' same place, ye'd be glad to git together."

Anderson's face changed quickly.

"I'll go with him, Skipper," he said with an engaging smile. "He's a good scout, but I was sore on him for a little matter. He's a good man in a dory an' I'll be glad to mate up with him. Where is he now? Aboard th' vessel, ye say? All right, Cap, I'll ship."

Collins was sitting on the *Seldovia's* cabin house, overhauling a tub of haddocking trawl when Anderson jumped aboard.

"Hullo, Westley, boy!" cried Tom heartily as he held out his hand. "Jest came acrost an' h'ard from th' skipper you was lookin' for a dory-mate. I cal'late you 'n' I will make a pretty good pair in a dory. What d'ye say, West?"

The other grasped the proffered hand and assented heartily.

"Sure thing—bully! I'm more'n glad ye kem aboard. I was for goin' uptown an' lookin' around for a dory-mate, but you're a home-town feller an' jest th' man."

"I'll go git my clothes-bag an' tick down an' see ye later. How many tubs does he rig?"

"Eight to a dory," replied Westley.

"Humph! American style. Hard fishin', I reckon," said Anderson heartily. "Waal, Westley, I cal'late you 'n' I kin stand the racket aboard these hard-drivin' market fishermen. I'm a hound for work myself. We'll git along fine. So long! I'll be down in a while an' help ye overhaul some gear."

Collins continued his work, whistling happily at the thought of having Tom Anderson for a dory-mate. As he had been away from Anchorville all Summer, he was unaware of the relations that had formerly existed between Elsie Conover and Anderson. He knew that the latter was acquainted with Elsie, but then Tommy Anderson was a devil with all the Anchorville girls. So while Westley crooned and whistled to himself, thinking of Elsie Conover away back home in Nova Scotia, Tom Anderson strode cursefully to his boarding-house with black hate in his heart.

"Th' silly swab!" he muttered through clenched teeth. "Fancy th' likes o' him grabbin' Elsie! Th' boob! An' to tell that silly mug, Jack Hooper, all about it, an' Jack to put th' hook into me by th' tellin' of it. 'West Collins has cut ye out with Elsie Conover,' says he, with his smug face laughin' as he spun th' yarn afore his sister. Thought maybe that Jen Hooper would stand a better chance with Elsie out of th' way. An' when I telephoned Elsie! 'He's to ask me again in th' Spring,' says she. 'Towards th' last o' March. Westley'll be back then an' I'll know my mind which o' youse it'll be.' Th' big mug, —— him! Ay, to —— with him!"

So vociferous had he become in his denunciatory epithets that he spoke his thoughts aloud, and two or three people looked at him strangely.

His facility in concealing his feelings came uppermost; and while hate consumed him inwardly, yet outwardly he carried an air of heartiness which belied the murderous thoughts fermenting in his brain.

Carrying his bag and mattress to the vessel, a half-formed notion raced through his mind. It was a sinister notion—a black-hearted idea—but there was nothing of it in his voice as he hailed his dory-mate.

"Hey ye go, Westley, boy! Catch a-holt o' my dunnage. I'm all ready t' give ye a hand now, ol' dory-mate!"

II

THE *Seldovia* put to sea and fished on George's Bank. As dory-mates, Collins and Anderson got along famously, and the rest of the gang remarked that Collins had picked up a dandy partner. Anderson not only did his share of the work, but seemed eager to help Collins in every way. In the dory, Anderson was for doing all the trawl-hauling—the hardest and heaviest work—and his dory-mate often protested. "You must let me do my share, Tom," he would say. "You're doing all your work an' part o' mine too. I'm able enough, an' ye mustn't do it. Not but what I take it as kindly of ye, Tom. It shows th' big heart ye have, and a better dory-mate I never sailed with."

Anderson laughed.

"I'd do anythin' for a good scout," he said, "an' you're one o' th' best, Westley, boy. Watch an' wheel, baitin' up an' haulin' trawls, it's a pleasure for me to work with ye. Lord Harry, old townie! We'll hold her down together this Winter—the best an' ablest pair that ever swung a dory over."

He turned his back to Collins and the smile on his face turned into a look of the most malignant hate. Lord! How he detested the big simple-minded fool! He'd get him even though he had to play his masquerade the whole Winter season.

Aboard a fishing vessel a man has a thousand opportunities to rid himself of a rival or an enemy. An accidental shove on a dark night when the two were alone on watch, and Collins would swell the list of fishermen "drowned at sea from the vessel."

Yet many times, Westley stood by the lee rail absolutely unsuspicious of the sinister thoughts in the mind of his dory-mate a few feet behind him. In the dory, with Westley standing in the bow, hauling, and Anderson coiling just aft of his hated rival, a smash on the head with the bailer, a slingding rock, or the dory-jar would send him headlong into the chilly green depths never to rise again.

A man clad in heavy sea-boots, with Winter clothing and oilskins on, goes down like a stone, and dories are easy craft to fall out of. Out on a bowsprit furling a jib in the dark of a Winter's night with the wind blowing and the sea roaring, a moderately strong push under the chin would topple a man over backwards and his shout would be unheard by his shipmates a few feet away. Oh, ay, there were many ways, but Anderson waited his chance and smiled and joked and laughed while the man he was out to kill trusted him and felt that never, in all his going a-fishing, had he shipped with a truer and better dory-mate.

When dories are alongside the schooner in anything over a flat calm, a dory-painter *must* be held in the hands of some person aboard. On no account must it be made fast to a pin or a cleat. With a vessel under sail and heading through the water, the dory is rolling alongside and tugging and jerking at the painter in the rise and fall of the sea. The man holding the bow rope eases off when the dory tugs, but were the painter belayed to an unresisting object, the cranky craft is liable to capsize or swamp.

On a rough January day on Brown's Bank, the *Seldovia* was running out her string of ten dories. All the little craft were slung over, and Number Ten, Collins' and Anderson's, was the last put over the rail.

Westley jumped down into the boat and Anderson handed him the four tubs of baited trawl, while the cook held the painter and the skipper busied himself aft. The latter had occasion to go into the cabin for something and slipped the wheel into the becket. Anderson turned suddenly to the cook.

"Jump down, Jack, an' hand me up a few doughnuts or something for a mug-up for me 'n' West. I'll take that painter."

The cook handed the rope over and went down into the forecastle. Anderson saw that his dory-mate was busy stacking the trawl tubs and clearing the buoy-lines in the pitching dory, and with lightning-like swiftness he belayed the painter to a pin in the rail. Springing over to the forecastle scuttle, he jumped down the ladder and began shouting at the cook:

"Look alive, Jack, with that grub. D'ye think we kin wait all day?"

A cold sweat broke out on his face as a muffled yell told him something had happened and he leaped on deck to see the skipper with the long dory-gaff in his hand make a drive at something over the rail.

"Aft here, some one!" roared Tim Davidson. "Gimme a hand or I'll lose him!"

And as Anderson raced to the quarter, he felt that his plan had failed.

When Collins had been hauled, gasping and red-faced, over the rail, the skipper opened the ball.

"What in Hades d'ye mean by belayin' that dory-painter?" he bawled. "Don't ye know enough? Ain't you bin a fishin' long enough to know that dory-painters sh'd never be made fast when there's a man in th' dory? Consarn me! Ef I hadn't jest heppened to come on deck jest as that dory capsized an' gaffed yer dory-mate, there would 'a' bin a drownin' scrape on yer hands. Help me git that dory up on th' tackles while th' cook sees to Collins. He's 'most all in."

A few minutes later, Anderson was down in the forecastle where Collins was changing his sodden clothing. Striding across to him, Tom grasped his hand.

"Say, old man, I'm sorry I was guilty o' sich a lubber's trick. I jest went to git some grub from th' cook for a second an' I took a turn with th' painter, thinkin' she'd be all right for a moment. I sh'd ha' known better, an' 'tis bitter sorry I am that I sh'd ha' risked th' life o' my old dory-mate. Ye'll forgive me, West, for 'twould ha' bin a sore day for me sh'd I have lost ye."

"Say nawthin' about it, Tom," answered Collins with a laugh. "'A miss is as good as a mile,' an' we all make mistakes sometimes. Too bad we lost th' gear——"

"I'll pay for that!" said Anderson hastily.

"No, ye don't, boy. We'll half up as good dory-mates should. Say no more about it."

Anderson went to his bunk in the peak and raged inwardly.

"It was a lubber's trick all right," he growled to himself. "But, —— him, I'll get him yet!"

JANUARY and February passed and the windy March days worried the fishing-fleets and had them lying at anchor in shelter harbors when they should have been fishing for the great Lenten market. The *Seldovia* had made a good Winter of it, but Tim Davidson was anxious to make a high-line haddocking season and took more risks in setting dories out than would most skippers.

Anderson, with wonderful strength of mind, kept up his heartily friendly relations with Collins and effectually disarmed all suspicion. So well did he play his game that Westley looked upon him as his best chum and even confided in him his prospects for the future. One can imagine the tumult which raged in Anderson's mind as he listened to Collins's clumsily worded confidences about Elsie Conover.

"We'll ha' made a good stock this Winter, Tom," confided Westley, "and I cal'late I'll hev enough to get married on. I'm for buyin' that small pink o' John Anson's and I'll go hake fishin' in the bay so's to be near home an' her."

Anderson puffed hard at his pipe and nodded interestedly.

"Sure, Westley, boy, that's the grand idea. No married man sh'd go off Bank fishin'. It's risky, an' ye're away from home too much."

He spoke the words easily, but his whole nature longed to beat, kick, tear and even kill the man he addressed.

With hate burning in his heart, Anderson went on watch that night and took the first trick at the wheel. Collins paced the lee quarter, keeping a look-out. It was a black dark night with plenty of wind, and the *Seldovia* was storming along on her way to the Bank, plunging and pitching through the gloom.

Collins in his pacing had a habit of standing for a minute or so at the after-end of the cabin-house near the wheel. Anderson, with a calculating eye, noticed this—he had noticed it for weeks—and he pondered over a villainous plan as he steered.

"Next time he stands aft with his back to me I'll give him a shove," muttered Anderson coolly glancing at the low rail. "It won't take much to push him over that, and I kin swear he was for'ard when he went over th' side."

Collins continued his pacing and Anderson watched him like a cat and muttered to himself:

"He'll make four turns an' then stop. That's one—there's two—three—four. He's stoppin'. Now for it!"

He let the wheel spokes go and nerved himself for the push on the broad oilskinned back of the man three feet in front of him. Collins was crooning a little song to himself and standing with his mittened hands behind his back. Anderson tensed his muscles for the shove that would send his rival headlong into the roaring void of sea.

"Wheel thar! How's she headin'?" It was the skipper's voice from out the cabin gangway and Anderson grabbed the spokes again in sudden fright, and in the reaction forgot the course.

"Wheel thar! How's she headin'?" The skipper came half-way up the steps and shouted louder.

"Er—er—ah—west b'south-half-south, sir!" blurted Anderson wildly.

"That ain't what I gave th' watch," growled the skipper coming on deck and glancing in the binnacle, "and you ain't steerin' that. You've let her run off. She's headin' sou'west. Bring her up west half south and watch yer steerin'. Some o' you fellers don't seem to know th' compass yet." And he went below.

Collins looked hard at his dory-mate.

"Say, old man, you're lookin' sick. Gimme that wheel an' you go down for'ard an' hev a mug o' tea. West half south! I got ye, Tom, so go ahead!"

Anderson felt sick, but it was more the sickness occasioned by strained nerves and thwarted revenge than anything else. He was furious. Muttering curses to himself, he dropped below into the forecastle and poured himself out a cup of tea. One of the men was sitting on the lockers doctoring a poisoned hand, and being anxious to rid his mind of an unpleasant episode, Anderson spoke to him.

"What stuff is that ye're puttin' on there, Jim?"

"That's arsenic," answered the man. "It's great stuff fur burnin' away th' proud flesh from them p'izenings by rusty hooks."

"Ain't that arsenic a deadly p'izen itself?"

"It sure is—ef ye were to drink it. A teaspoonful 'ud stretch ye stiff inside a minute. It's one o' th' deadliest p'izens known. Thar's enough in this bottle to p'izen ivery man aboard. Drop it in that tea-kittle an' th' *Seldovia* 'ud hev a gang o' corpses arter breakfust-time."

The man finished his doctoring and stowed the bottle away under his bunk mattress. Anderson watched him curiously and as he finished his tea an idea flashed through his mind which caused him to smile.

III

IT WAS a dark, dirty-looking morning when they made the Bank, and the barometer was hovering on the 29.5 and dropping. Davidson was anxious to make a few sets before the next March gale struck in, and he blinded himself to unpromising forecasts and ordered the dories away.

"Set tub an' tub, fellers!" he sung out. "An' watch th' vessel. I'll h'ist th' queer thing for ye to come aboard ef it comes away nasty, but ye can't always tell—we may git a whole day here afore it breezes up. Away ye go, now, top dory over!"

Collins and Anderson, oilskinned and seabooted, hauled their baited trawl tubs to the rail and overhauled their buoy-lines.

"Cal'late I'll go below an' fill th' dory-jar with fresh water," said Anderson. "I'll git a bit grub as well. Ye never know when one o' them snow squalls is a-comin' up an' we'll take no chances 'case we git astray from th' vessel. A drink an' a bite help some ef ye sh'd be a day or two adrift in a dory."

Grasping the earthenware water-jar, Anderson jumped below into the forecastle. The cook was on deck giving a hand at the dory tackles and there was nobody below. The fisherman gave a hasty glance around and delved with his hand under the mattress in a lower starboard bunk until he found a small bottle.

"Arsenic!" he muttered. "That's the stuff!" And drawing the cork, he poured the poison into the dory-jar.

"I'll fill Jim's med'cine bottle with water or he'll maybe git suspicious. Enough to kill ivery man aboard, he said—Um! I cal'late West Collins 'ull take a sudden turn o' heart trouble in th' dory today after he has a drink. Our tank-water is bilgey an' he'll niver notice any queer taste. Now for some grub."

On deck, the men were busy swinging the dories over, and Anderson placed the water-jug and the parcel of food on top of the gurry-kid.

"That's our water an' grub, West," he said to his dory-mate who nodded.

"Git that jib on her some o' yez!" cried the skipper just then. "You Anderson and you Watson—ye might jump out an' set that jib!" And the treacherous fisherman turned to execute the order with an apparently careless glance at his dory-mate who was carrying the water-jar and the food to their dory.

Some hours later when they were hauling their third tub of gear in the dory, the weather changed with the fickleness of the season. The wind came from the southeast in spiteful gusts, and the swell was momentarily getting heavier. Overhead, the leaden clouds spread across the sky in an opaque thickness and the horizon became misty and undefined.

Collins, hauling the trawl in the bow of the dory, paused and looked around.

"Don't see th' vessel, Tommy! Cal'late it's a-goin' to breeze soon!" Anderson, coiling the gear amidships, was smoking and staring anxiously at the dory-jar lying at his dory-mate's feet. He was nervous, terribly nervous, and his overwrought imagination was picturing the sight of his hated rival writhing in the death-agonies among the fish and blood-stained water in the dory bottom. So preoccupied was he with his ghastly thoughts that he did not heed the ominous portent of the weather.

"I reckon we'll jest haul this tub an' make for th' vessel," said Collins. "We're a-goin' to git a snifter in a while."

"Aw, ——!" growled Anderson irritably. "This ain't goin' to be nawthin' but a little snow squall. Ef we run back aboard every time it gits cloudy we'll niver git 'ny fish. We'll set the other tub yet."

Westley looked at him strangely, looked at sea and sky, and resumed his trawl hauling.

"You may be right, Tom," he thought, "but th' weather looks bad—mighty bad. And th' vessel's nowheres in sight."

The other had sense enough to know that it was time to be getting aboard, but he wanted to see Collins drink first. Blast the man! He had been hauling for hours — hot, thirsty work — and hadn't even broached the jar for a drink. Usually, West Collins would drink half the jar inside of the first two hours. He was an awful man for water and drank more than any man aboard. Anderson had purposely allowed him to do all the trawl hauling that morning, as the exertion would be likely to excite thirst and cause him to drink earlier than usual.

There was a wind rising now and the black-green sea was beginning to crest under its impetus. A breaker burst under them and slapped a few gallons of water into the dory which was jumping and rearing like a fiery, untamed bronco.

"Startin' to breeze!" shouted Westley, turning a spray-reddened face to his dory-mate.

"Keep a-haulin'—it's nawthin'!" answered the other, bailing the water out.

The dory gave a wild lurch and the heft coming on the thin trawl-line caused it to part at the roller.

"We're parted!" yelled Collins. "Git yer oar out an' head her up, Tom!"

Suddenly the horizon was blotted out in a pall of smoky gray. The wind began to pipe up and tear the crests off the waves and hurl them through the air like rain, and stinging sleet hurtled down from the somber gloom aloft. The dory, tossing like a chip, drove off to leeward, with the two men in her tugging at the oars.

"Where in blazes is th' vessel, Tommy, boy?" shouted Collins trying hard to peer into the blinding, face-stinging spray and sleet.

"I didn't notice," growled the other sullenly.

He was feeling savage at the predicament his folly had got him into. Adrift on Brown's Bank in a March southeaster! It was no joke. In his blind hate, he felt less chagrined over that than in the fact that Collins had not broached the water-jar yet. However, there was time enough. But he hoped that his rival would drink before the schooner drove out of the smother and picked them up.

For an hour they tossed around in the inferno of gale-whipped, sleet-lashed sea; plying the oars to keep the little craft from swamping and keeping a lookout for the vessel. The perspiration was pouring off Collins's face and Anderson noted the fact with strange satisfaction.

"By golly, Tom, but I'm thirsty!" grunted Westley, panting. "I ain't had a drink sence we left th' schooner. Gimme that dory-jar!"

Suppressing the wild feeling of joy which thrilled him, Anderson passed the water-jug aft. The other threw in his oars, drew the jar plug, and deftly tipped the receptacle into the crook of his elbow preparatory to drinking. Anderson watched him with bated breath and bulging eyes.

Suddenly, Collins lowered his arm and put the cork back in the jar.

"No!" he said slowly. "I cal'late I won't drink yet awhile. We may need that water badly afore we git out o' this. If we're astray it might mean a pull to the land—a good seventy or a hunder miles away. Here ye are, Tommy! Hev a little swig ef ye feel like it. I kin hang out for a spell."

"No—no—no!" almost shrieked Anderson. "I don't need any. Keep it for later."

And when his dory-mate placed the precious jug carefully down on the dory bottom, the potential murderer grasped the oar handles savagely and clenched his teeth to suppress the flood of raging oaths which rose to his lips.

For two hours they pitched and tossed about, saying but little to each other. The sea was blank of any other craft, and both knew that they were astray. The wind was increasing in violence. It was snowing heavily, and the sea was running over the fifty fathom water of the Bank in gigantic undulations capped with roaring crests.

"We'll hev to make th' land somewheres!" yelled Collins. "We'll pitch out th' fish an' git her shipshape fur a long pull. Due north by th' dory compass oughter fetch us up somewheres on th' Cape Sable shore. What d'ye say, Tommy, boy, shall we run for it?"

"Ay! Go ahead!" growled the other.

Westley noticed the change in his demeanor, but put it down to the fact that he was frightened.

"Cal'late he don't like the idea o' bein' adrift," thought Westley. "Waal, I don't blame him. Thar's plenty good men scared when they know they're astray. I 'member wunst pickin' up a dory on Green Bank, iced up an' with two men in it frozen as stiff as herrin's. Th' thought o' gittin' like them scares me too, but never say die!" And he set to work pitching out the fish.

Swinging the dory off before wind and sea, they shipped their oars and pulled for the land some sixty or seventy miles away.

IV

THE wind commenced to veer to the northwest by sundown and it blew hard and bitterly cold. The change in wind and the set of the tides kicked up a terrible sea, and both men realized that they could not run the dory much longer.

"We'll lash that trawl anchor inside o' that trawl tub an' pay it out to wind'ard with th' buoy-line to it. It sh'd make a drogue that'll keep us headin' to it ontil things ease up." It was Collins who made the suggestion.

Anderson nodded sullenly and made no attempt to assist his dory-mate. He was parched with thirst and eyed the dory-jar with a decidedly uneasy mind.

Westley whistled calmly as he prepared the drogue. Not being gifted with much imagination, he did not worry about the future. Properly handled, the dory would live out the sea; there was enough water for a week in the dory-jar if used sparingly; they had some bread and doughnuts. The cold would be the worst peril.

With the wind northwest, it would freeze the spray which drenched the frail dory, and they would have to pound the gunwales and the dory interior clear of weighty, encumbering ice—ice which would swamp them if allowed to make. Well, pounding ice would keep them warm, so there was always a bright side to things. Westley whistled cheerfully, while his dory-mate regarded him with a baleful light in his eyes, and strange suspicions crept into his disordered mind.

"Thar' we go!" cried Collins happily, after heaving his improvised drag over. "She'll ride like a duck now, an' we'll lay to the oars in the mornin'. Sure to be lots o' vessels around. We'll see them to-morrow, for this wind'll clear things up." Looking at Anderson, he said with some concern, "You ain't lookin' bright, Tommy, boy. Better hev a little drink an' a bite."

Anderson was about to refuse, when an idea entered his head. Yes! he'd make a bluff at drinking from the water-jar. If he were to decline, the chances were that Westley would decline also.

"Pass me the jug," he said hoarsely.

He tilted it up, placed the jar to his lips and allowed the water to wet them. Not a drop entered his mouth, though the temptation was terrible. What a queer smell the water had!

"Here ye are, Westley," he grunted thickly. "You hev a slug now. I've had mine."

Collins took the jar, and looked hard at him.

"I don't believe you took a drink at all," he said. "You made a bluff at it!"

"Aw, ye're crazy!" growled Anderson, restraining his desire to smash the smiling Collins across the face for his suspicions. "What sh'd I make a bluff for? D'ye think I'm a blasted camuel?"

The other took a long, almost affectionate look at his dory-mate, and raised the jar to his lips. "Waal, here's happy days, Tommy, boy!" And he took two great gulps while Anderson watched him almost fascinated.

"Lord, Harry! But that water tastes good," said Westley. "Better'n all th' rum ever brewed." He made a wry face. "Ain't it bilgy an' bitter-like, though?"

It was getting dark now, and Anderson could hardly discern his shipmate's face. He watched him intently. Something would happen soon.

"I cal'late this wind'll blow hard from th' nor'west all night," remarked Collins calmly. "She's beginnin' to ice up already."

He took the bailer and knocked the film of ice off the dory gunwales beside him. Anderson cowered aft in the stern of the dory and waited developments.

"God!" he thought. "He sh'd feel that

p'izen now! I wonder how he'll die? Will he git suspicious, an' make for me afore he goes? Or will he crumple up quickly?"

For fully ten minutes he waited, every nerve on edge, for the hoarse cry or the sliding thump of Collins' body into the slush and water on the dory bottom. Heavens! The man was a long time feeling the effects of the poison. It was strong enough to kill a man in a few minutes, he knew, and the water in the dory-jar was highly charged with the stuff.

The sea was running wild and the foaming crests gleamed phosphorescent in the dark of the night. Anderson lolled in the dory's stern and watched Collins like a hawk for half an hour, and when he heard Westley singing to himself, he felt that something was wrong.

"He couldn't ha' drunk that water," he murmured to himself. "He's wise, an' made a bluff. I wonder ef he knows how I hate him——"

"Oh, thar, Tommy!" came Collins's cheery voice. "How ye makin' out?"

"All right!" growled the other.

"Ain't feelin' th' cold?"

"Naw!"

Westley resumed his singing, and Anderson cursed him under his breath.

"How kin that swab sing," he muttered, "when I kin hardly speak with th' dryness o' my tongue an' mouth, —— him!"

THROUGHOUT the long night the dory pitched to the drogue, and ice formed on the gunnels and thwarts. Collins sat on the for'ard thwart and kept an eye on the buoy-line holding the drogue, and occasionally busied himself clearing the ice away.

Anderson, burning with thirst, lay huddled up aft, his mind a whirl of conflicting thoughts and strange schemes. In a daze he watched his dory-mate, and his hate for the unsuspecting Collins grew until it almost consumed him.

"He bluffed me, by Judas!" thought he. "He never drank that water, or he'd have been a dead one by now. God! How thirsty I am!"

He broke a piece of ice from the gunnel and began to suck at it. It was salty, so he threw it away with a curse. He pulled out his pipe and attempted to smoke, but it only seemed to increase his thirst, so he stowed it away again.

The tardy daylight came at length, and Collins rose to his feet and stretched himself with a yawn.

"How ye feelin', dory-mate?" he said cheerfully.

"All right," grunted Anderson.

"Cal'late we'd better hev a small drink an' a bite, an' make a move. What d'ye say?"

The other nodded, and rising to his feet stamped his rubber boots and swung his arms. Though heavily clothed, both felt the cold.

Collins carefully opened the little paper parcel and handed Anderson a doughnut.

"Pass me th' jar!" said the latter.

He turned his back to Collins and placed it to his lips. Fear of the poison which it contained restrained him from allowing a single drop of the precious fluid to moisten his parched tongue, though the temptation was frightfully hard to resist. With a great show of wiping his lips, he passed the jug over to Westley.

"Aha! that feels better," he remarked hoarsely.

The other was chewing at a doughnut, and washed it down with a swig of water from the fateful jar while the other watched him swallow. It was only a small gulp, but after finishing the doughnut Collins took another one, and without replacing the cork, handed the receptacle to Anderson.

"Hev another little swig, Tom!"

"Naw, I've had enough."

He was vainly trying to swallow the doughnut, but the food tasted like sawdust in his mouth, and with a muttered oath he blew it out again when Collins was hauling in the drogue.

"He'll croak this time," thought he. "He didn't bluff in that drink. I c'd see it goin' down his throat——"

"All aboard!" cried the other. "Lay to yer oars, Tom, old son. We'll head to th' no'th'ard."

Both men shipped their oars and commenced to row. It was twenty-four hours since Anderson had a drink or anything to eat. He was feeling the pangs of hunger and thirst—thirst especially—but he pulled stolidly and awaited the tragedy which he knew must happen soon. Collins may have made a bluff at drinking yesterday, but he surely drank that morning.

Several times he glanced over his shoulder to make sure that his dory-mate was still alive. He did not need to do that, as he could see the blades of Collins' oars at the end of his stroke, but he wanted to see his face. The sight was not encouraging. Westley was smiling and smoking and very much alive.

"——! There's something wrong," muttered Anderson savagely. "Th' p'izen don't seem to hurt him."

The wind was going down and the sea ran in long swells, over which they pulled monotonously. They sighted a vessel, but she was far off and making a passage. Anderson was feeling the lack of a drink, and suffered acutely. He was beginning to think that the poison was neutralized to some extent by the amount of water it was mixed with. Later on he would take a small drink himself. If West Collins was strong enough to be proof against the poison, so was he, and a small drink would relieve his agonies.

They pulled, with but a short spell now and again for a rest, until late in the afternoon. Not a vessel was to be seen, and around them rolled the blank expanse of tumbling blue-green sea.

"Better hev another little drink," said Anderson throatily. "Go ahead, an' pass me th' jug."

Collins hove in his oars, reached for the dory-jar and took a good mouthful. "Thar's plenty water left," he said, giving the jar a shake before handing it to the other.

Anderson turned around in his seat and grasped the jug with his mittened hand. His fingers were almost frozen inside his mittens, and he failed to hold the handle tight enough, and it slipped from his hands. Striking the dory gunwale as the little craft gave a lurch, the precious water-jar plopped into the sea and vanished with but a few bubbles marking where it disappeared.

"God!" almost screamed Anderson. "It's gone!"

"It sure is!" grunted Collins dolefully.

Thirty-six hours without water made Anderson endure the torments of Dives. The hard work of pulling the dory made him sweat all the moisture out of his body. He was suffering, and Collins noticed it.

"Feelin' bad, Tommy, boy?" he asked kindly.

"Yes, blast you, yes!" snarled the other, and Westley looked at him curiously.

"H'm," he murmured sadly. "Poor Tommy's breakin' up quick. I sh'd ha' thought he'd have hung out better'n this. He's had th' same as me, and I ain't feelin' anyways weak yit. Hope we sight a vessel soon, fur I can't tell when we'll make th' land with them queer tides swingin' us all ways." Aloud he said: "Throw in yer oars, Tom. I'll pull her along, an' you take a rest——"

"I don't want a rest!" snapped the other. "We've got to git out o' this. Gimme that compass aft here——"

He was going to say more, but his articulation failed him.

When night shut down they were still rowing, and the wind was beginning to breeze again from the northeast. Collins noticed it, and shook his head.

"A bad quarter. We're goin' to git another blow," he said.

V

DAYLIGHT revealed a dory lifting and tumbling over a wind-whipped sea flecked with roaring crests of foam. The drogue was out again, and Westley Collins sat on the bow thwart and watched the line.

In the stern crouched Tom Anderson, red-eyed and panting like a dog, his tongue was swollen and clove to the roof of his mouth. Every now and again, in spite of his dory-mate's objections, he sucked at a handful of sleet.

"Tommy, old man, don't suck that stuff," pleaded Collins. "It's salty, an' 'twill make ye feel worse."

Anderson answered with a hoarse, throaty growl. He was suffering intense agony, and his brain whirled with the idea that he owed his tortures to his companion. The mad hate which imbued him was increased a thousandfold now, and he longed to kill the man who was his successful rival in love and who seemed to be invulnerable against the various attempts he had made on his life. Strange it was that a man's love for a flighty girl should conjure murderous thoughts and actions and result in such implacable hatred. Anderson was going mad.

Throughout the long day the dory rode to the drogue while the wind blew a bitter gale from the northeast and a heavy sea tossed the frail craft like a chip. Sleet and snow fell at intervals, and Collins collected some in his sou'wester and forced the frozen moisture between Anderson's swollen lips. Even while he was engaged in this act of kindness, Anderson had the dory-knife hidden underneath his body and seriously contemplated an effort to stab the man who was trying to alleviate his sufferings.

He lacked the energy, however, to make the effort then, and decided to wait until dark. The little water that Collins had collected for him in the short squalls of snow and sleet refreshed him a little and made him feel better, but his head throbbed and his tongue was so swollen that he was unable to talk. Collins himself was beginning to feel the lack of water, but while his dory-mate lay in the stern, he busied himself bailing out the boat and tending the drogue-line. Smoking made him feel thirstier, so he threw his pipe and tobacco overboard.

When the night shut down again, the gale showed signs of breaking up. The wind quieted down to a moderate breeze, but the sea still ran very heavy.

"We'll git under way at daylight," muttered Collins. "I hope we'll git picked up tomorrer. It's a long pull to the land from here, and I reckon we've been blowed offshore agin. Another day, an' poor Tommy 'll croak."

It was bitterly cold—savage weather to be lying in a dory-bottom—and West went aft and tied lashings of marline around the wrists and the legs of Anderson's oilskins to keep the bitter wind and spray out.

"You'll be warmer now, Tommy, boy," he said cheerfully. "We'll git picked up tomorrer sure, an' we won't do a thing in muggin' up aboard th' vessel that takes us aboard. We'll eat our way through th' shack locker an' drink her tanks dry. Ain't gittin' friz, are ye, Tom?"

The other gave an inarticulate groan and glared at Collins with a strange light in his eyes.

"I don't like his looks," muttered Westley. "He's goin' batty, sure. Another day, an' he'll go crazy an' jump overboard. He's bin drinkin' salt water an' chewin' at his mitts all day. God help us! I wonder ef He sees us in this here dory bargin' around th' Western Ocean. I cal'late I'll say a little prayer."

And the brave fellow knelt over the for'ard thwart and prayed—a sailor's prayer, simple, original and pregnant with a childlike faith:

"Dear God, our Father in Heaven. I ain't always singin' out to You to bear a hand like church folks an' Salvation Army gangs, but listen to me now, an' send a vessel this ways before noon tomorrer, or my dory-mate'll croak. I thank You, God, for listenin' to me, an' I promise not to bother You again. Amen!"

IT WAS black dark—the hour before the dawn—and Westley Collins lay dozing in the bow of the dory. Anderson, awake, and with his mad hate spurring him to extraordinary efforts, felt for the handle of the dory-knife concealed behind him. Grasping it, he sat up and peered at his sleeping dory-mate. God—how he hated him!

The girl was forgotten now, and Anderson scarcely knew what he hated Collins for, but the idea possessed his mind to the exclusion of everything else, and he longed to kill the man who regarded him as his dearest friend. Strange? Even Anderson had to smile at the thought.

His feet were too numb to stand upon. Encased in rubber boots, they were chilled to the bone. So he crawled laboriously for'ard with the knife in his hand. Crawling over the midship thwart he made a noise, and Collins awoke from his lethargic doze and sat up.

"What's up?" he cried as Anderson made a savage lunge at him with the knife.

The blade drove into Westley's oilskin coat and ripped it from the shoulder to the waist, but the heavy sweater-coat which he wore under the oil-jacket prevented the knife from cutting to the skin.

"Eh, eh!" growled Collins closing with the maddened Anderson. "Crazy already!"

Imbued with extraordinary strength, Anderson rose to his feet and made several vicious stabs at the other who held him around the waist and by the right wrist. Both struggled desperately—the one to kill, and the other for possession of the knife—and the dory careened dangerously with their efforts. For a few seconds they wrestled, panting and growling, and then the dory capsized and threw both men into the water.

Both were separated by the sudden immersion, and as quick as a flash Collins struck out and grasped the drogue-line and the bow of the upturned dory. Turning to look for Anderson, he saw the gleam of yellow oilskins floundering and splashing a fathom away and caught sight of his dory-mate's face.

Without a moment's hesitation he reached for the trailing dory-painter, and twisting it around his arm, swam for the drowning man. Grasping him by the collar, he hauled himself and Anderson back to the dory and hung to it for a minute while he regained his breath.

Tom Anderson was unconscious, but, though heavily clothed, was no great weight in the water owing to the lashings around his wrists and the bottoms of his oil-pants keeping in enough air to buoy his weight. Collins knew that, as his own were keeping him up, but he also knew that the air would gradually escape and the dead weight of Winter clothing and top boots would soon send him under.

On all dories there is a rope-loop rove through the dory-plug. This loop is outside on the dory-bottom and is made for the purpose of a hand-hold should the dory be capsized, and many a fisherman owes his life to a dory-plug becket.

Collins crawled up on the dory-bottom and grasped the plug-strap with one hand and dragged the inanimate body of Anderson alongside with the other. Thrusting his dory-mate's arm through the loop, he got the dory-painter and tied a bowline under Anderson's shoulders and made it fast to the plug becket. This served to secure him and kept his head and shoulders out of water.

With his dory-mate safe for the moment, Collins caught the two trawl buoys which floated near the upturned boat, and hauling himself to the bow by the bight of the dory-painter, pulled himself up on the dory-bottom. By doing so, he steadied the capsized craft and brought the unconscious Anderson farther out of the water at the other end of the dory.

The water was bitterly cold and the air colder. Though thirsty and half-famished, chilled with the cold and played out with his strenuous exertions, Westley set to work, and, overhauling the buoy-lines, he lashed the kegs on either side of the dory.

"That'll steady her," he panted. "We may have to hang here for a good many hours. Now for Tom. I'll git him on th' dory-bottom, an' lashed."

And dropping into the water again, he worked his way aft and, hoisting his dory-mate's prone body on to the dory-bottom, he passed several turns of buoy-line around him and the boat.

The sea was smoothing out and ran in long, oily swells. A light breeze was blowing from the west, and when the first flush of the dawn illuminated the eastern sky, Westley hailed the prostrate Anderson:

"Oh, thar, Tommy, boy! How're ye makin' out?"

The other evidently heard him and waved a feeble hand. The immersion in salt water relieved him considerably from the tortures of thirst, and he felt better. Lying on the dory-bottom, Anderson, though in a comatose condition, was able to sense his position and knew how much he owed to Collins. In a dull yet comprehending way he felt that his feelings had changed.

In spite of the dreadful experiences he had undergone, Collins had an instinctive feeling that rescue was near. Since he prayed, his heart had lightened considerably, and he hung to life with a hopeful persistence which gave renewed strength to his abnormally rugged constitution.

"Ef Howard Blackburn c'd stick out nine days adrift in a dory, I cal'late I kin hang out part o' that time on a dory-bottom ef it don't git colder or breeze——"

He turned his head, and there burst upon his sea-weary eyes the joyful sight of a vessel heading towards them.

It was a fisherman under four lowers, and from his position Collins could see her sails shivering as she rounded up to windward. A voice rolled down the wind.

"Weather up yer jumbo! Git a starboard dory over! Away ye go!"

"We're saved!" hoarsely shrieked Westley. "Tommy, boy, wake up! We're saved! Vessel ahoy! Dear God, I thank ye! We're all right now, dory-mate. Plenty to eat an drink 'board o' that packet." And he talked and shouted until the rescuers in a dory cut him adrift and hauled him and Anderson aboard.

"THREE days an' three nights adrift in a dory in that last breeze!" exclaimed the skipper of the *Annie L. Westhaver*. "An' no food an' water! Sufferin' Judas! You're a tough guy, Collins. Your dory-mate ain't made very good weather of it, though I think he'll come around. We'll run ye into Shelburne an' git ye fixed up— A tough guy, by Jupiter!"

In a forecastle bunk, Anderson, with toes and fingers badly frost-bitten, lay and raved in delirium. He talked strangely of a dory-jar and arsenic, and in his ravings the name of Elsie Conover was mentioned. Westley Collins, little the worse for his experiences, sat on a lee locker and yarned with the gang while the schooner stormed on her way to Shelburne.

"He's th' best dory-mate a man ever had," he was saying. "He got himself into that state because o' me. Boys, he purposely avoided drinkin' from our dory-jar so's I'd git th' water sh'd we be adrift long. He knew I was promised to a gal back home, an' he wanted to see me live. Ain't he a *man* for ye?

"And do ye know, boys, it might ha' bin worse, 'cause I was nearly goin' off in th' dory without a jug that day. We was in a hurry settin' out th' string that mornin' an' when I hove our dory-jug down inter th' dory it struck one o' th' trawl anchors an' broke. I wasn't agoin' to bother gittin' another one, but th' skipper sees it an' says to me: 'Here! Take this spare jug with ye, an' git away. Winter fishin's no time to neglect carryin' a full dory-jar, and I never let a dory leave th' vessel without water aboard.'

"Lucky for me he was so particular, but it done poor Tom no good. He hung out without drinkin' a drop so's I'd git it all. An' when he couldn't hold out no longer he lost th' jar overboard jest as he was for havin' a drink. Poor old Tom! Boys, oh boys, but he's a man with a big heart!"

VI

MISS ELSIE CONOVER knocked apprehensively on the door of the Anderson cottage. An elderly lady answered the summons.

"Oh, Miss!" she exclaimed anxiously, "I'm glad ye've come. Tom's bin askin' to see ye all afternoon. He's had a terrible time down on th' fishin'-grounds, an' 'most died but for West Collins. Come right up."

With a strange fluttering at her heart, Elsie entered the plain bedroom and hesitated half-frightened when she caught sight of the haggard features of the man she loved.

"Oh, Tom!" she cried with a catch in her voice.

The sick man turned and beckoned to her.

"Come over here, Elsie," he said quietly. "Mother, please leave us for a spell."

The girl approached the bed and sat down in a chair.

"Tom, Tom," she said. "What happened out there?"

He ignored the question and stared at her with eyes which were cold and penetrating.

"I'm a-goin' to talk to you, girl!" he said after a pause. "What kind of a game are you playin' with West Collins?"

She flushed and dropped her eyes in confusion at the question. "I—I'm not playing any game with him, Tom."

"Do you intend to marry him?"

She made no answer, but fingered her dress feverishly.

"Do you intend to marry him?" came Anderson's insistent voice.

"No!" blurted the girl.

"What did ye mean by tellin' him ye'd give him yer answer in th' Spring?"

"I—I—oh, don't ask me, Tom. I—oh, don't be so cruel!"

"All right, I won't. Ye told me th' same thing. What was your idea? Who did you intend to have? Him or me?"

The girl grasped his bandaged hand nervously.

"Why, you, Tom. I always intended to marry you, but you were chasing around with 'Jen' Hooper. I—I only told him that so's you'd be jealous and come to me again."

Anderson withdrew his hand and nodded slowly.

"Huh! So that was the idea. Waal, you started a fine pot a-boilin'. Now, I'll talk to ye. West Collins and I hev bin dory-mates all this Winter. He's th' best dory-mate I ever had, and a man's man. He told me about his deal with you. Me, of all men! Me, that was crazy over you an' whom you made th' same promise to. He talked to me of his prospects an' his future with you as his wife. He's madly in love with you, and talked to me about you in our watches and in th' dory. To me, mind ye—me that really wanted you worse than he did!"

He paused for a moment and stared at her pallid face.

"I made a vow that he'd never see you again. I was out to kill him. Actin' as his dory-mate, mind ye, I meant to put him out o' th' way at th' first chance. I tried it several times—" she shuddered—"but failed every time, thank God! He never suspected, an' treated me as his best friend. Then we got adrift in th' dory. 'Twas my fault, that. I tried to kill him then by p'izenin' th' water in our dory-jar. Th' jar was changed, but I didn't know it, an' fur three days an' three nights adrift I darsen't have a drink.

"I went through hell then, woman, an' went crazy. I tried to knife Westley, an' th' dory capsized. He saved me an' hauled me up on th' dory an' lashed me there. I won't tell ye any more. I've told ye enough, an' ye'll please not breathe a word o' what I've told ye."

The look in his eyes frightened her.

"Now," he continued steadily, "when West Collins goes to see you, you'll accept him. I won't have ye, for I don't care about ye any more. He's in love with you, an' believes in you. He thinks you love him. You do—you'll have to! You ain't a-goin' to make a bluff like I did. You've played your bluff—so did I. I pretended to be his friend. I hated him, but I love him now. He's a man's man. You'll love him too."

He paused and continued in a kinder tone:

"Elsie—my love for you is dead. I've changed it for West Collins. He's a man what's true blue. He ain't none o' yer fancy kind, but he's all there, and he'll make ye a better husband than ye deserve. You marry him, an' ye'll be happy."

"But, Tom, I don't love him," almost wailed Elsie. "It's you I ——"

"Forget it!" snapped the other. "I have no use for ye. I'm for hookin' up with Jennie Hooper whom I used to go with for years."

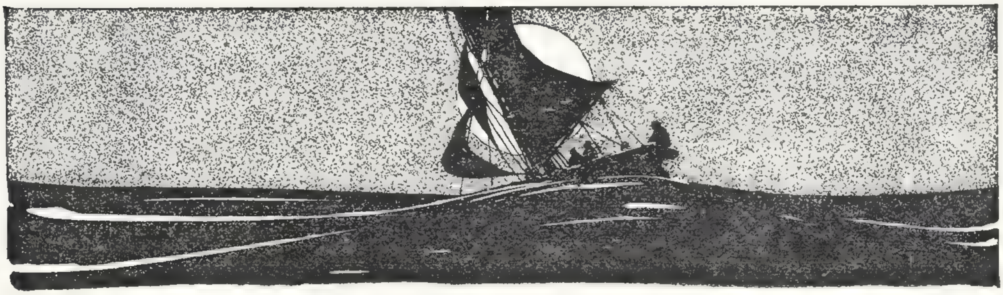
Miss Conover felt a strange pang, and Anderson knew that the shot had gone home. Jennie would have him, he knew, and Jennie was a nice girl. He saw her in the hospital at Yarmouth before he came home, and was sure of his ground.

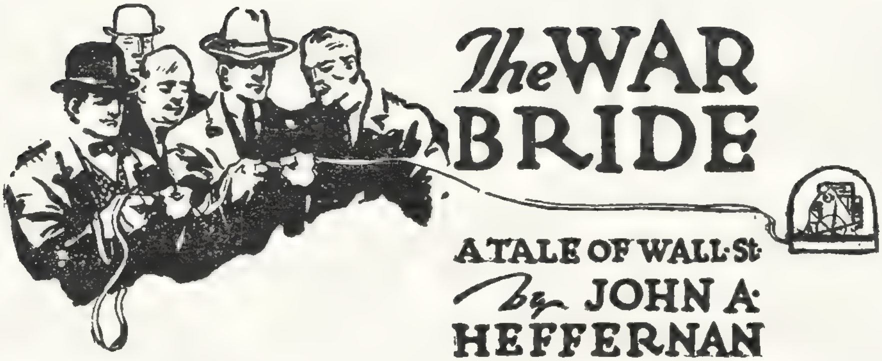
"Yes," he said, "you can count me out. West Collins is your man, and he's one o' th' best. You'll marry him, Elsie, an' keep yer promise. Goodby!"

The following announcement in the Anchorville *Daily Echo* pertains to the story:

> At the Anchorville Baptist Church, on Wednesday afternoon, Miss Elsie Conover was united in holy matrimony to Mr. Westley Collins—both of this place. Miss Jessie Theriault acted as bridesmaid, and Mr. Thomas Anderson acted as best man.

Human nature is a queer thing. Love begets jealousy; jealousy begets deceit and hate; and hate begets murder. Yet in the case of Westley Collins and Tom Anderson, these passions led to mutual respect and abiding love between them. If Collins had known? It is perhaps better he did not.





The WAR BRIDE

A TALE OF WALL St

By JOHN A. HEFFERNAN

Author of "The Trust Builder," "The Baby and the Wireless," etc.

THE LITTLE clock struck four. An ormolu clock with a silver chime, resting on no less distinguished a piece of furniture than the writing-table of the President of the United States. *Tee - eeng — tee - eeng — tee - eeng — teeng - ng - ng!* Just like that. Light-hearted little clock, gayly striking so ominous an hour in the history of the world!

Outside the White House window the dusk of a Winter twilight, the cold amber of an evening sky, and one scarlet streamer whipped out by the northern blow. Inside —within reach of the little clock—a spare man with a heavy heart and a scholarly brow on which lay the shade of thought. The calendar beside the time-piece gave the information that it was December, the sixteenth day of the month, and a year that will be remembered.

The President drew his long fingers across his long chin and sighed. At home stories of bread lines in the cities, of Hotels de Gink crowded with the unemployed, of new social forces weaving a new plan of politics with the threads of economic distress, and abroad the red ruthlessness of an unprecedented war. On our borders a hopeless anarchy, and afar off a strange and not friendly nation reaching out for spoil and power.

No wonder the chosen leader of a hundred million people felt the mantle of power heavy upon his shoulders. Things were breaking bad for the United States.

When the little clock struck four in Washington it was a quarter to ten at night in the City of Berlin. In a room in that square palace on the avenue of the linden trees, half a dozen girdled men clustered 'round a long table. A map lay unrolled upon it.

Poring over the map as he sat on the very edge of a chair at the table end was William, the Kaiser, his chin resting on his hands and deeper than usual the vertical cleft between his brows. His right hand dropped to the paper and with his index finger he traced a course from the Skagerrack, north of Scotland and then south, paralleling the Irish coast, until the finger rested below St. George's Channel. The bearded, somber-browed von Tirpitz, standing beside his sovereign, nodded.

"Right there, sire," he said.

William frowned. Without answering his navy chief, he raised an inquiring eye to von Bethmann-Hollweg, who stood on the opposite side of the table.

"How goes it in the East?" he asked. "Von Hindenburg holds them?"

"Drives them, rather, sire," answered the minister. "Fear not for the East!"

"Von Hindenburg will do what a man can do," broke in von Tirpitz, "but miracles are beyond him. You have seen the inventories, sire. You know what we have in foodstuffs, what we have in cotton, what we have in copper, and you know the rate of consumption. Don't ask von Hindenburg or any other man to fight mathematics. The issue is determined in advance."

"And you would do what, then, Herr Minister?"

"England with her navy would starve us. We must starve her first."

"But the poor devils! Without a warning——"

"How can we warn?"

"Ay, to warn would be to fail. But I am

thinking of passengers—of women and children."

"And, sire, I think for the Fatherland!"

The Kaiser sprang to his feet, a sudden blaze in his eyes.

"And I," he cried, his voice ringing with passion and his sword springing from its sheath and flashing naked above his head, "for the Fatherland!"

With a slither of steel on steel, five answering blades leaped from their scabbards and met his, point to point above the table, and those five grave men roared out the answering cry:

"For the Fatherland!"

AT THIS same momentous hour it was nine by the clock in London. There is a famous building in Downing Street, one of whose committee-rooms held the shapers of British policy. Asquith, the premier, was there, with his cameo-cut features and his faultless apparel; Sir Edward Grey, handsome, ample in brow, slow and grave in manner; Kitchener of the bent brows, immobile features and curt, harsh speech; Lloyd George, slight, quick-eyed, fiery, vehement little man. General Kitchener was speaking.

"You gentlemen realize, now, I presume," he said, "that the task before us is no child's play. It isn't a time to forego advantage. We can deliver the blow on the wind; why hold back our hand?"

"What do you want, Kitchener?" snapped Lloyd George. "We've contrabanded to the limit of precedent."

"Take the limit off," answered the soldier bluntly.

"What? Foodstuffs?"

"Yes—and cotton!"

Sir Edward Gray raised his brows.

"General, there are considerations you overlook," he said. "It would excite some resentment among our friends in the United States. We have some protests from Washington already. I am sure they will be more vigorous if we resort to such measures."

"Apologize, and pay," growled Kitchener.

"But it means the starvation of civilians," protested the Premier.

"Precisely," agreed the chief of the War Department. "And the civilians won't starve—they'll sue for peace."

Lloyd George had been pacing the floor rapidly, his chin buried in his chest. Suddenly he swung 'round and struck the council table with his clenched fist.

"Kitchener is right, gentlemen," he said. "It's the shortest road to the end of this butchery. The British ideal of government must rise above all other considerations. It means too much to democracy to let it be crushed. Let him have his order, for the sake of England."

A flush came into the faces of the other men, and even Kitchener's eyes brightened.

"For England!" they answered, leaning forward in their chairs.

We shall leave them, these sorely perplexed statesmen, each doing what seems to him right in the human game of cross-purposes, and hurry back to New York which sets its clocks by Washington time.

In a big banking-house in the Wall Street section of the city five of the masters of American finance sat in conclave on the American business situation. They went over the factors of business life and found underlying conditions not unsatisfactory. At last the leader of them all, the man whose face had all the granite strength of his race, shook his head.

"Artificial stimulation will fail, gentlemen," he said. "Indeed, I can say it has failed, because we have tried it. We shall profit hugely by present conditions if we can break this moral paralysis that keeps us inert. What we want is something to start it going. It must be spontaneous, however. It will come one of these days, and until it comes we must wait. It may be only a small thing."

The reader is here parenthetically invited to consider how small a thing relatively is a boil on a man's neck.

MR JACOB G. BUCKMULLER looked at his watch. It was four o'clock. Then, instead of returning to the study of the afternoon newspaper as he had intended, he glanced sharply across the aisle of the subway-car in which he was sitting.

The object of his sudden interest was a stout man with an ample forehead, a pair of tortoise-shell-rimmed spectacles, and a silk hat. Beside him sat a thin man with delicate, highly intelligent features. The more portly of the two had just said to his companion:

"I'll take five million in 'C.C.'!"

"Very well," said the other, as he made

an entry in a little note-book which he thereafter slipped into his pocket.

Mr. Buckmuller carefully examined them both, noting their attire and their demeanor. The raiment was well-cut and of good material, the air unquestionably one of prosperity.

"Five mill-ee-own!" murmured Mr. Buckmuller under his breath. "Some considerable little spec', yes, yes!"

He raised his newspaper and turned quickly from the sporting page to the financial page. His glance ran down a column of letters and figures until it rested on this line:

"Cons. Cop. 21, 21½, 21."

This indicated that in the Stock Exchange that day the price of the stock of the Consolidated Copper Companies had been $21 a share at the opening of business, that it had risen as high as $21.50 during the day, and had fallen back to the opening price.

Mr. Buckmuller pursed his lips. If you do not know the gentleman it may be well to introduce him: He is a short, plump, shrewd-faced young native of the City of New York, employed as advertising manager by the well-known firm of Armitage, Barnes & Curley, vendors of breakfast cereals. His accidental meeting with Harold Armitage, son of the senior member of that firm, had resulted in his employment.

Shortly thereafter Mr. Buckmuller married Celia, the stenographer, whose oval face and placid blue eyes had won his heart. They were very comfortably domiciled in an uptown apartment, whither Jake was bound on this fateful sixteenth of December. All the way uptown he revolved in his mind that mystical sentence:

"Five million in 'C.C.' Five million in 'C.C.' Five million in 'C.C.' "

The sentence circled 'round and 'round in his brain. It was still in rhythmical gyration as he entered his home, divested himself of hat and overcoat, and sank into his favorite chair.

Celia gazed at him from the clear depths of her serene blue eyes, but said nothing. She was a wise little Celia, who had learned to wait for the inevitable revelation. It did not come until the maid was removing the remnants of dinner. Then Jake leaned back with the satisfied sigh of a well-filled man and gazed across the table at the Attic countenance of his wife.

"Celia," he said, as with the tines of his fork he traced an invisible 5,000,000 on the table-cloth, "I've been thinking of the steam-yacht. Shall we fix her up for next season with an onyx smoke-stack and a pale pink satin bowsprit?"

"Nut," answered Celia sweetly.

"I repeat, Madame," said Jake, "that my mind is contemplating some changes in the layout of our Newport Villa. Would it be well to have the forward deck terraced down to the waterfront, the levels being seeded with orchids, bulbuls and orioles, and a crystal peristyle projected diametrically, so to speak, upon the main façade?"

"Meaning——"

Celia arched her brows interrogatively.

"Meaning," said Jake, "that by the merest accident I've gotten one rich rosy pipe of a tip on a very good buy on the 'street'."

"Now, look here, Jake!" said Celia. "You just pickle that rich red rosy pipe of a tip in a nice little hermetically sealed can. The last one you had depressed our savings-bank account by five hundred perfectly good dollars. The idea, when everybody says business is bad, to go plunging our money into Wall Street!"

"Hush-a-by-baby. How you talk!" protested Jake. "It's just that yellow-streak stuff that keeps business in what the prexy down there at Washington calls a psychological depression. Be a little sport, Celia! There's poor Mr. Wilson trying to find out what put the sigh in psychology. Have a little patriotism! Give him a chance!"

"Nothing doing," answered Celia with a determined shake of her little golden-brown head. "Four per cent. and a sound night's sleep look good to me."

Jake pursed his lips and sighed. He realized that his frontal attack on the savings bank had been a failure, and he retired in good order.

"Never mind, kid," he said. "You keep your bundle, if you feel that way, but watch me. I'll kick in with my little checking account. The only 'diff' will be a steam-yacht without a villa, instead of a steam-yacht with a villa."

Jake stood up and walked slowly out of the room. When he returned, his hat was in his left hand and he was buttoning his overcoat with the other hand.

"Going somewhere?" Celia asked.

"Club, kid," Jake answered. "There are

some who will not reject golden advice. Not every friend of mine puts on the chain-lock when opportunity gets in its proverbial once-in-a-lifetime knock."

"All right," smiled Mrs. Buckmuller. "But don't get any one in who can't afford it, Jake."

IT WAS rather early for the club. Some few bachelor friends of Jake's were finishing their dinner in the dining-room, and they hailed Buckmuller and pressed him to take a class of wine.

"A friend of mine," said Jake as he held up the glass and watched the bubbles stream up; "a friend of mine passed me the whisper on an excellent thing today. Perhaps you boys would like to get in on it, eh, what?"

"Get in on what?" asked Dick Vanderlening, the lawyer.

"Consolidated Copper" answered Mr. Buckmuller.

"Oh, pshaw! There's nothing doing in stocks," Vanderlening declared.

"Well bo, press this against your ear and let it soak in," Jake said impressively. "There'll be a thing or two doing within a very short time. 'C.C.' will be over par like a dot over a little 'i' as sure as you sit where you sit."

"But—aw why?" broke in Gil Hoskins, New York agent for a London shipping firm. "There's no business going, old top. Why should such a rise in the value of this particular security occur? It's quite irregular, you know."

"Listen!" Jake said, lowering his tone and leaning forward. "This is copper. Get me—copper! Indispensable in manufacture of war munitions. They've got to have it. Big interests realize the situation. Why a friend of mine—one of the biggest operators in the street—gave an order for five million dollars' worth this afternoon. Get that? Five million, and he talked as if it was a mere collar-button. You fellows can do as you please, but I'm pushing all my blue chips into the pot."

The men 'round the table leaned forward, deeply interested.

"This is straight, Jake? You've got it right?" Vanderlening asked.

"Right? You betcha it's right!" Jake assured them. "You don't think I put any dream stuff across on regular fellows, do you?"

The evening visitors were beginning to arrive and Jake picked out those he knew well as they entered, whispering to each his important information. Before he left for home the clubrooms were buzzing with speculation and comment on the projected drive in "C.C."

Early the following morning Mr. Buckmuller entered the office of Ransom & Flake, bankers and brokers. He drew a check for $500 from his pocket and handed it over to Mr. Flake.

"How much Consolidated Copper will that buy?" he asked.

"Let's see," said Mr. Flake, adjusting his eye-glasses. "We would have to have a twenty-point margin—you might as well buy outright, I presume."

"What I want to do," said Jake, "is to put that five hundred plunks down on Consolidated Copper, straight and place, at top odds."

"We can buy twenty shares and credit you with eighty dollars," said Mr. Flake, as he pressed the button for the cashier.

"All right—let her slide at that," agreed Mr. Buckmuller. "When she reaches the century mark, I'll tell you what to do next."

Harold Armitage, junior member of the breakfast-food firm, looked up as Buckmuller swung into his office.

"Morning, Jake," he saluted. "Why the particularly sunny smile? You look like you had a good bet down on something."

"Clairvoyant stuff," answered Jake. "Very good, Eddie. Now, tell these ladies and gentlemen what the good bet is."

"Test is too severe, Jake. What is it?"

"Well," said Jake, as he picked up his morning mail, "it's the best little chance to make a million that's come whooping this way in a long, long time. I've been buying a little block of Consolidated Copper."

"Buying stock? Why, Jake, you're crazy!"

"Nix on the paper-doll stuff. Look here, Harold, what would you think if you heard a stout, millionairish sort of a person calmly announcing that he'd take five million in a certain security, eh, what?"

"What would I think?"

"Poll-parrot business, eh. Nobody home but the door-mat, and that's on the way out. *Hic, haec, hoc*—particularly hick."

"Meaning that I'm a——"

"Righto. American genus. Hard, bony shell, almost impenetrable, and that sort of thing. Squirrels follow you about, and that sort of stuff."

"Well, Jake, say it in plainer language. What's on your mind?"

"Only this. The biggest interests in this country are buying Consolidated Copper. I know—know! Get it—not guess, but know—that one big whale is gobbling five millions' worth."

"Go on!"

"I'm on already. Better put in an order while the buying's good."

Harold picked up his telephone.

"Two-naught-nine-eight Broad!" he called.

When the connection had been made he asked for Mr. Blake.

"Hello Jim, is this you?" he said. "How did Consolidated Copper open? Twenty-one, eh! What? Gone up a point? Buy a hundred shares for me!"

Meanwhile Jake was talking earnestly to old Tom Armitage, the head of the firm. That gentleman's ruddy face with its two belligerent banners of side whiskers became deeply interested as his favorite employee unfolded the story.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed at last. "It sounds good, Jake. I think I'll risk a little flyer. Got to do something when honest business is so gol-danged dull, you bet your life. By the way, Jake, would it do any harm to let a few good fellows in on this?"

"Not a bit! Get 'em in before the big show opens."

Mr. Armitage reached for the telephone. His own brokers soon had an order to buy five hundred shares for him. Then he began to get his friends on the wire. To one after another he told the remarkable story. At luncheon he went from table to table in the Iron Materials Club, distributing tips on Consolidated Copper.

Down at the Merchants' Harold was also whispering to a few friends in confidence that certain friends of his in the world of "big business" were getting in on the ground floor in Consolidated Copper. On his way home that evening Jake read in the financial column of the *Evening Sun:*

> There was one little eddy in a sluggish market. Consolidated Copper showed considerable activity all day long, numerous small lots being bought at prices that advanced an eighth at a time. The security closed at 22, a point above the opening quotation.

"Very good, Eddie," approved Mr. Buckmuller.

At dinner Celia regarded him steadily until he lighted his cigar and quenched the match in his finger-bowl.

"Well," she said, "what about the Wall Street thing?"

"Getting interested, eh?" answered her husband. "You have not seen an evening paper, have you? Didn't notice the announcement that 'C.C.' went up six and two-eighths?"

"Six and two-eighths?"

"H'm! That's eight-eights, isn't it?"

"Never mind the figures, Jake. How much money are you ahead?"

"Well," Jake evaded, "this is only the beginning."

"How much?" Celia persisted.

"Er—twenty dollars," confessed Jake, his voice a little weak.

Celia sniffed.

"That's about enough to buy the pink ribbon for the yacht," she said. "And you risked five hundred for that?"

"Oh, come now!" protested Mr. Buckmuller, "this is only the beginning, you know. Talking about that yacht, don't you think we ought to have the front door paneled in bronze, and a cute little Parisian forepeak? Those Joffre effects are very fetching."

"Oh, stop your nonsense! Here are your slippers, and there's your rocker. I want to show you the sweetest little gown. The dressmaker just brought it down this afternoon."

The following day was an exciting one in Wall Street. Buying orders began to flood in. Stock brokers who had dismissed or suspended clerks sent them telegrams to report at once. Jake, who had been in telephone communication with his broker half a dozen times, and had spent the luncheon hour with the ticker-tape running through his fingers, read and reread the following article in the *Evening Sun:*

> Beyond all doubt, there is a live wire in Wall Street. Consolidated Copper, after the preliminary flurry of yesterday, shot up ten full points today. Trading in this mining stock was unprecedentedly heavy. All sorts of rumors are current in the street. It is said that one of the allied governments has entered the American market for unlimited quantities of copper. The whole market seemed affected by the advance in "C.C." All securities went up from one to two points.

Celia listened patiently while Jake recited to her the story of the day's thrilling events.

"I hate to wake you up, it's so beautiful," said Mrs. Buckmuller at last, as Jake was spending his millions in the construction of a combination sun-parlor and rathskeller under the lee scuppers of his yacht, "but, if you don't hurry up and dress, we'll be late for the show."

A twenty-point rise in "C. C." was recorded the next day. More than that, all the stocks affected, or likely to be affected by war orders, began to make brilliant flights. The railroads and general industrials lagged behind, but they were on the upward slope also, and brokers reported a healthy public demand for them.

Thus began Wall Street's golden season. From all over the country money flowed into the stock market. Brokers' clerks worked night and day trying to keep up with the business. Outside Wall Street, industry began to sit up and take notice.

Bread lines dwindled and disappeared. The leaders of finance lost their air of preoccupation, and the President of the United States began to smile quite cheerfully. Jake Buckmuller sold out and counted the profits on his "pyramided" speculation to the still incredulous Celia, who was not convinced until he endorsed a check for a hundred thousand dollars to her order.

IT WAS the day on which Celia deposited her big check. The most noted of American bankers, soon to overshadow the Rothschilds as a world financier, sat in his office through whose windows there flowed in a flood of warm Spring sunshine. His strong features were relaxed as he chatted with a portly gentleman who sat across the desk from him.

"It has been wonderful, Doctor, to see America shake off her lethargy," he said. "When we were worrying over the matter last Winter, I thought some little thing would start the ball rolling. It has interested me to trace this one of the mysterious impulses that emerge from sources hidden in the great mass of men.

"My agents report to me that the first order of that initial flurry in Consolidated Copper was a purchase of twenty shares by a young man employed as advertising manager in a concern that prepares and sells a well-known brand of cereals. I have sent for him and he is outside. Let us have him in and learn why he made that investment. The odd thing is that he confidently assured Mr. Flake, the broker, that the stock would go to par. Mr. Williams, a patient of yours by the way, who is president of the company, couldn't have predicted it then, because he didn't know it any more than I knew it."

He pressed a button. A clerk opened the office door and looked in, inquiry on his face. The banker nodded. The clerk turned and beckoned, and Jake Buckmuller entered the room, the clerk closing the door behind him.

"Mr. Buckmuller," said the banker courteously, "won't you take a chair? This is my physician, Dr. Clark."

Jake turned to acknowledge the introduction and stood still, staring at the ample brow and the spectacles with the rims of tortoise-shell. For the first time in his life the jaunty self-possession that was his by right of birth, failed him. Recovering his faculties quickly, however, he bowed and sank into the chair the banker had indicated.

"I was interested in knowing why you bought Consolidated Copper, Mr. Buckmuller," the banker explained. "Would you have any objection to telling me?"

Jake grinned.

"Better get the dope from your friend," he answered. "He was in, and for a big jump, right at the pop of the gat. Mine was only piker stuff—follow-the-leader business."

The banker turned to the perplexed face of the physician.

"I'm sure I don't know, for the life of me, what the young man is talking about," said Dr. Clark.

"Oi-yoi, you don't!" said Jake. "You didn't ride up in the subway with a thin guy on the sixteenth of last December? *You* didn't?"

"But I did ride uptown with a slender gentleman on that day," said Dr. Clark. It was the day we opened the Romney Laboratory. My companion was Dr. Teal, the serologist."

"Don't short-change on the information, Doc," urged Jake. "Tell him what you said."

"What I said?"

"Righto—about taking five million in 'C.C.' "

"Oh! Why I had a boil on the back of my neck, and I asked Dr. Teal to make me a vaccine for its treatment. I told him I wanted a strength of five million of the dead microbes to a cubic centimetre. 'C.C.' is simply an abbreviation for cubic centimetre. It was just a medical formula, a prescription for the boil on my neck."

The light of amused understanding had been growing in the eyes of the financier. At the conclusion of the physician's explanation he broke into a hearty laugh.

"So," he said, "that's what started it! We don't know much about medicine, and we can't pass on the virtue of your prescription as a specific for boils. But we do know—don't we Mr. Buckmuller?—that it was most-excellent medicine for a sick stock market?"

"Quite a considerable tonic," agreed Jake. "Say," he added grinning at the smiling banker, "she was some gorgeous little war-bride, wasn't she?"

PARADISE BEND

A FOUR-PART STORY--PART II

by WILLIAM PATTERSON WHITE

Author of "That Which is Written," "A Pair of Queens," etc.

SYNOPSIS—The famous Lazy River country is held by three great ranches, the Cross-in-a-Box, the Bar-S, and the 88. *Tom Loudon*, cowpuncher, and *Sam Blakely*, manager of 88, are rivals for the affection of *Kate Saltoun*, whose black eyes have flashed favor at a half-dozen men. She is daughter of *John Saltoun*, owner of Bar-S, *Loudon's* employer. *Loudon* has reason to believe *Blakely's* outfit is stealing Bar-S cattle. *Saltoun* will not believe this; *Kate* favors *Blakely*, and *Blakely* frames up proof that *Loudon* is rustling 88 cows. This proof falls flat, but in a quarrel *Loudon* wounds *Blakely* and is forced to leave Bar-S.

On his way to Paradise Bend *Loudon* stops at Farewell, *Blakely's* town, where he threatens *Sheriff Block*, an adherent of 88, with exposure. Whereupon he finds a warm friend in *Captain Burr*, a tin-pedler from "the Bend." The Captain asks *Loudon* to make the *Burr* home his headquarters till he finds a job.

Loudon rides into Paradise Bend alone. A stranger, *Pete O'Leary*, arouses *Loudon's* suspicions at once. *Mrs. Burr* and her daughter, *Dorothy*, give *Loudon* a hearty welcome. Old *Scotty Mackenzie*, a friend ranch-owner of the *Burrs*, hires *Loudon*. On the trail to the ranch *Mackenzie* suddenly notices an 88 brand on *Loudon's* horse. At the point of a gun he forces a promise from *Loudon* to go on to the ranch alone. *Loudon*, bewildered, dares not look back as he rides away.

CHAPTER VIII

THE AMAZING MACKENZIE

DOUBLEDAY, a squat man with a sharp nose and a sharper eye, evinced no surprise at his employer's message. He merely swore resignedly on learning that Mackenzie had not sent in the mail by Loudon, and in the same breath thanked his Maker that a new man had arrived.

The advent of Loudon was most opportune, according to Doubleday. For, one "Lanky" having taken a wife and removed to the Sweet River Agency, the Flying M was a man short.

"Turn yore hoss into the big corral," said Doubleday, when he had sufficiently condemned the foolishness of Lanky, "an' take yore saddle over to the bunk-house. There's three empty bunks. Help yoreself. Then c'mon over to the little corral an' bring yore rope. Got an outlaw stallion with a cut hind leg, an' it's a two-man job."

Loudon found favor in the eyes of Doubleday. The former Bar-S puncher did his work easily and well. He proved a better roper than Doubleday, and he was the equal in horsemanship of "Telescope" Laguerre, the half-breed buster.

With Laguerre, Loudon struck up an instant friendship. Telescope—which name was the natural transformation undergone by Telesphore in a Western climate—was a long, lean man, with the straight black hair and the swarthy complexion of his Indian mother, and the mobile features and facile speech and gestures of his French father. When Loudon had been at the Flying M three days, Telescope suggested that they ride to town in the evening.

"We weel go to de dance-hall," said Laguerre. "Fine woman dere. We weel dance a leetle, we weel dreenk de w'iskey, un we weel have de good tam. By gar, I not been to town for two mont. W'at you say, Tom?"

"I'd sure enjoy goin' along, Telescope, but I can't," replied Loudon, mindful of his promise to Scotty Mackenzie.

"Dat ees all right," said the large-hearted half-breed. "She ees my treat. I have more as one hundred dollar, un by gar! I wan' for to spen' eet. You are my frien'. You help me for spen' eet. We weel burn up de dance-hall."

"Oh, I'm not broke," said Loudon. "I'll go with ye another time."

Laguerre, being wise in his generation, forbore to insist, and rode to town alone. The cook predicted a three-day orgy.

"Rats!" said Doubleday. "Ye don't know Telescope. He never gets drunk. He can't. He sops it up an' he sops it up, an' it don't bother him a mite. Wish I had his gift. Why, I've seen him tuck away a quart o' killer inside o' three hours, an' then hop out with his rope an' fasten on a hoss, any leg you tell him. He's a walkin' miracle, Telescope is, an' he'll be back in the mornin'."

Loudon, oiling his saddle in front of the bunk-house, glanced casually at the cook standing in the doorway, and wondered for the twentieth time where he had seen the man before. On his arrival at the Flying M, Loudon had sensed that, in a vague way, the cook's face was familiar. First impressions had taken no concrete form. He could not remember where or under what circumstances he had seen the cook. But that he had seen him, he was certain.

The cook's name was Rufe Cutting. Which name, however, was not enlightening. Idly speculating, Loudon went on with his work. The cook returned to the kitchen.

Laguerre bore out the statement of Doubleday. He returned while the men were saddling in the morning. He did not appear in the least degree wearied. Hurriedly changing his saddle to a fresh horse, he rode away with Loudon.

"By gar!" exclaimed Laguerre. "I have de fine tam. I dance, I dreenk de w'iskey, un I play de pokair wit' Pete O'Leary un two odder men, un I take deir money. I ween feefty dollar. By gar! I am glad I go to town, me."

"Ye sure ought to be," said Loudon. "Fifty dollars. That's right good hearin'."

"Pete O'Leary she wan' for know 'bout you," continued Laguerre.

"Pete O'Leary asked about me! What did he say, anyway?"

"Oh, she not say eet plain. She walk een de watair. But I have been de scout; I have leeve wit' Enjun; I know w'at ees een ees head. She talk 'bout Lanky quittin' de Flyin' M, un she wan' for know have Scotty hired new man. She say she see Scotty ride out wit' you, un she know your name. But I not say much. I tell Pete O'Leary to ask Scotty 'bout hees business, un I not say eef you work for de Flyin' M or not. For I tink mabbeso Pete O'Leary she ees not frien' to you."

"Well, he ain't strictly hostyle anyway," said Loudon, and he forthwith told Laguerre of his meeting with Pete O'Leary, and of the latter's strange actions.

"Dat ees varree fonny," commented Laguerre. "Pete O'Leary she was expectin' de frien' or de message mabbe. But dat ees not so fonny as hees askin' 'bout you so moch. She worry 'bout you, un dat ees fonny. Why she worry eef she hones' man? I tell you, my frien', I do not trus' dat Pete O'Leary. I would watch heem. I would watch heem varree sharp."

"Oh, I don't believe it means anythin'," doubted Loudon. "But I'll keep an eye skinned for him."

"You better, my frien', or mabbeso some tam she skeen you."

A WEEK later Mackenzie returned. That evening, after supper, Doubleday told Loudon that Scotty wanted to see him. Mackenzie, chair tilted, feet propped on the table, his hands clasped behind his head, was staring up at the ceiling when Loudon entered the office. The chair descended on four legs with a crash, and the ancient arose briskly.

"Stranger," said Mackenzie, his blue eyes no longer frosty, "I was mistaken. Yo're a gent an' a white man, an' I ain't holdin' out nothin'. Shake."

Loudon grinned and shook hands. He was satisfied with the other's apology.

"That's all right," said the puncher. "I knowed ye mistook me for somebody else. But I'd sure admire to know, if it ain't private, who ye thought I was."

"I don't mind tellin' ye. I ain't ever talked about it much. Dunno why. No reason why I shouldn't. Sit down, Loudon, an' I'll tell ye. When I first seen ye there in Main Street that 88 brand on yore hoss made me suspicious.

"Sam Blakely o' the 88 an' me ain't friends. We had a run-in some eight years ago over at Virginia City, an' I kind o' left Sam the worse for wear. I heard later how Sam was yellin' 'round that he'd get even. Knowin' Sam, I believed it. An' when I seen you ridin' a 88 hoss, I says to myself, 'Here's Sam done gone an' hired a party to do the gettin' even.' When ye wanted to ride for me, I was sure of it.

"So when you got down to fix yore cinches I expected to be plugged the next second, an' I throwed down on ye. Yore askin' me to send yore hoss an' saddle to Johnny Ramsay was what stopped me. I knowed if Johnny was a friend o' yores you was all right. So I sent ye on, an' I trailed ye clear to the ranch. If you'd turned back I'd 'a' downed ye. But ye didn't turn back.

"Well, after I seen ye talkin' to Doubleday— Sure; ye know that little hill 'bout half-a-mile south? I was on top of it with a pair of field-glasses—after I seen ye talkin' to Doubleday I moseyed south again to the Cross-in-a-box."

"Two hundred miles!" exclaimed Loudon.

"'Bout that," said Mackenzie easily, quite as if a four-hundred-mile ride in ten days were an afternoon jaunt. "Ye see, I wanted to talk to Jack Richie. Didn't want to go to the Bar-S if I could help it. Me an' Saltoun never did pull together. He thinks I'm a fool, an' I know he's crazy.

"Well, I talked with Jack, an' he explained everything. Said who ye was an' how ye'd bought yore hoss from the 88 an' how ye'd creased Sam Blakely, an' all. That was fine work. Too bad ye didn't down him for good. He's a varmint. Worse'n a rattler. Ye'd ought to 'a' plugged Marvin too, after him tryin' to make ye out a rustler thataway. A sport like that'll stand shootin' any day. What's the matter?"

For Loudon was amazedly staring at Mackenzie.

"Four hundred miles," said the puncher, "to see whether a forty-five-dollar-a-month hand was tellin' the truth!"

"Ye was more than a hand," rejoined Mackenzie, with a slight smile. "Ye was opportunity, with a big O. Ye see, when ye asked for a job I needed a man. I needed him bad. I was sure ye was out to down me. But when ye said ye knowed Johnnie an' I changed my mind about droppin' ye, it come to me, provided you was straight, that you was just the feller for me. You was sent to me, like. You was Opportunity, see?

"An' I ain't never passed up an opportunity that I ain't been sorry. I'm kind o' superstitious thataway now, an' I'll go out o' my way to grab what I think looks like an opportunity. I knowed I couldn't rest easy till I found out somethin' about ye. So I done it. An' I'm —— glad I done it.

"Doubleday tells me yo're the best roper he ever seen, an' yo're a wonder with the stallions. A good man with stallions is somethin' I've wished for ever since I owned the Flyin' M. I never had him till you come. Opportunity! I guess ye was, an' then a few. Now I don't know whether ye care about stayin', but I sure hope ye will. I'll see that ye don't regret it."

"Sure I'll stay," said Loudon. "Them stallions is where I live."

"Then fifty-five a month goes for you from now on."

In this auspicious fashion began Loudon's life at the Flying M. Yet Loudon was not precisely happy. The cheerfulness induced by the whole-hearted Burrs had been but temporary. He brooded over his wrongs, and that is bad for a man. Like all men who believe themselves hard-hit, he did not realize that there are a great many lonesome ladies in the world, any one of whom will make a man utterly happy.

One young woman had proved to be an arrant flirt, therefore all young women were flirts, and beauty was a snare and a delusion. So reasoned Loudon. Surrendering almost wholly to his mood, he rarely took part in the general conversation in the bunk-house. The men wondered at his aloofness, but none essayed to draw him out. His smoldering gray eyes forbade any such familiarity. When riding the range with Laguerre, however, Loudon would emerge from his shell, and a strong friendship swiftly grew up between the two.

ONE day, nearly two weeks after Mackenzie's return from the Cross-in-a-box, Loudon was in the blacksmith-shop making a set of shoes for Ranger, when Pete O'Leary rode up to the doorway and peered in.

"Hello," said O'Leary cheerily. "How's tricks?"

"Comin' in bunches," replied Loudon shortly, and he blew the bellows vigorously.

"That's good. Hot, ain't it? Well, I got to be weavin' along. So long."

Loudon walked to the doorway and watched O'Leary till he disappeared among the cottonwoods fringing the bank of the Dogsoldier.

"Now I'd sure admire to know," he wondered, "if Pete O'Leary stopped here just to ask how tricks was. He kind o' looked at your brand too, fellah," he added, addressing Ranger.

Thoughtfully he returned to his work. Five minutes later he whacked his knee and whistled. Comprehension had at last come to him. He marveled that it had not come sooner.

"Now, why didn't I think o' that quicker?" he muttered. "It was that 88 brand on Ranger's hip that made Scotty suspicious. So it was that brand must 'a' made O'Leary freeze to me when I sifted into the Bend. 'Couldn't Sam come?' Sam Blakely o' the 88! An' I never seen it till just now."

The moves of an enemy are always interesting. Even more thoughtfully than before, Loudon pumped the handle of the bellows. Why was Blakely coming to Paradise Bend? To settle his score with Scotty Mackenzie? Loudon doubted it. A newly engaged man does not, as a rule, jeopardize his future happiness by reopening old issues.

Whatever the precise nature of Blakely's purpose might be, it was dark and Machiavellian in the main. O'Leary's peculiar actions in the Three-Card Saloon evinced as much.

"I don't see how it could have anythin' to do with me," puzzled Loudon. "Sam couldn't 'a' knowed I was comin' to the Bend. I didn't know myself till just before I started. Yet here's O'Leary askin' Telescope about me an' skirmishin' over to see if I am at the Flyin' M. It sure is a heap mysterious."

Loudon decided to talk it over with Scotty Mackenzie.

CHAPTER IX

AUTHORS OF CONFUSION

WHEN Loudon went to the office that evening he found Doubleday alone.

"Scotty's gone," said Doubleday, in response to Loudon's question. "He's traipsin' over to the Seven Lazy Seven. Wants to get rid o' some of our no-account stock."

"When'll he be back?"

"Dunno. He may take in the Two Bar, Wagonwheel, T-V-U, an' the Diamond A before he comes back. He might stay away a week, or three weeks, or a month. Ye can't keep tabs on Scotty. I tried to once, but I give it up long ago."

Loudon did not take the garrulous Doubleday into his confidence. Nor did he mention the matter to Laguerre. The half-breed had seen O'Leary ride up to the blacksmith-shop, and his Gallic curiosity was aroused to the full.

"My frien'," said Laguerre, when Loudon and he were mending a break in the corral fence the following day, "my frien', I wan' for tell you somethin'. Somethin' mabbeso you not see. Yes'erday O'Leary she come to de ranch; she go to de blacksmith-shop. I see heem before she go to de blacksmith-shop. I see heem aftair. Before she see you dere een de shop hees face was de face of de man who ees not satisfy, who ees hunt for somethin'. W'en I see heem aftair, she look satisfy. She has foun' w'at she hunt for. Are you me?"

Loudon nodded.

"O'Leary's takin' a heap o' trouble on my account," he said slowly.

"More dan I t'ought she would," vouchsafed Laguerre. "I tell you, Tom, she have not de good feelin' for you. W'ere ees dat dam hammair gone?"

THREE weeks later, Loudon and Laguerre were lazily enjoying the cool of the evening outside the door of the bunk-house when Doubleday came striding toward them. In one hand the foreman waved a letter. He appeared to be annoyed. He was.

"Tom, Scotty wants ye to meet him at the Bend Tuesday—that's tomorrow," said Doubleday crossly. "Ye'll find him at the Three-Card. —— it to ——! An' I wanted you an' Telescope to ride the north range tomorrow! Which that Scotty Mackenzie is sure the most unexpected gent! Says he wants ye to ride yore own hoss. Dunno what he wants ye for. He don't say. Just says meet him."

Doubleday departed, swearing.

"Pore old Doubleday," drawled a bristle-haired youth named Swing Tunstall. "He sure gets a heap displeased with Scotty sometimes."

"Scotty ain't just regular in his ways," commented Giant Morton, a dwarfish man with tremendously long arms. "Scotty wasn't goin' beyond the Wagonwheel, if he got that far, an' his letter was mailed in Rocket, fifty miles south. I brought her in from the Bend this aft'noon, an' I noticed the postmark special."

"He wears the —— clo'es I ever seen," said the cook. "An' he's got money, too."

"Money!" exclaimed Morton. "He's lousy with money. Wish I had it. Do ye know what I'd do? I'd buy me a seventeen-hand hoss an' a saloon."

"I wouldn't," said Loudon, winking at Laguerre. "I'd have a *hacienda* down in old Mexico, an' I'd hire half-a-dozen good-lookin' *señoritas* with black hair an' blue eyes to play tunes for me on banjos, an' I'd hire cookie here to come an' wake me up every mornin' at five o'clock just so's I could have the pleasure o' heavin' him out o' the window an' goin' back to sleep."

By which it may be seen that the moody Loudon was becoming more human. His remarks irritated the cook, who rather fancied himself. He allowed himself to be the more provoked because of a growing belief that Loudon's habitually retiring and inoffensive manner denoted a lack of mettle. Which mental attitude was shared by none of the others.

At Loudon's careless words the cook bounced up from his seat on the doorsill and assumed a crouching position in front of Loudon.

"Ye couldn't throw nothin'!" yapped the man of pots and pans. "Ye couldn't throw a fit, let alone me! An' I want ye to understand I can throw any bowlegged misfit that ever wore hair pants!"

"What did ye throw 'em with—yore mouth?" inquired Loudon gently.

The Lazy River man had not moved. His arms remained folded across his chest. He smiled pleasantly at the irate cook.

"I throwed 'em like I'm goin' to throw you!" frothed the hot-tempered one. "That is," he added sneeringly, "if ye ain't afraid."

The bristle-haired Tunstall sprang between the two.

"Don't mind him, Loudon!" he cried. "He's only a fool idjit, but he's a good cook, an' losin' him would be a calamity. He don't never pack no gun neither."

"I can see he ain't heeled," said Loudon calmly. "But he sure talks just like a regular man, don't he?"

"Regular man!" bellowed the cook. "Why——"

The sentence ended in a gurgle. For Tunstall, Morton, and Laguerre had hurled themselves upon the cook and gagged him with the crown of a hat.

"Ain't ye got no sense at all?" growled Morton.

"'T's all right," grinned Loudon, rising to his feet. "I understand. Turn yore bull loose."

The three doubtfully released the cook. That misguided man promptly lowered his head, spread wide his arms, and charged at Loudon. The puncher sidestepped neatly and gave the cook's head a smart downward shove with the palm of his hand. The cook's face plowed the earth.

Spitting dirt and gravel he scrambled up and plunged madly at his elusive adversary. This time Loudon did not budge.

Even as the cook gripped him round the waist Loudon leaned forward along the cook's back, seized the slack of his trousers and upended him. The cook's hold was broken, and again his head collided violently with the ground. He fell in a huddle, but arose instantly, his stubborn spirit unshaken.

Now he did not rush. He approached the puncher warily. Swaying on his high heels Loudon waited.

Suddenly, with a pantherlike leap, he flung himself forward, drove both arms beneath those of the cook and clipped him round the body. The cook strove for a strangle-hold, but Loudon forestalled the attempt by hooking his chin over his opponent's shoulder. Legs apart, Loudon lifted and squeezed.

Gradually, as London put forth all his great strength, the breath of the cook was expelled from his cracking chest in gasps and wheezes. His muscles relaxed, his face became distorted, empurpled.

Loudon released his grip. The cook fell limply and lay on his back, arms outspread, his crushed lungs fighting for air. In the struggle his shirt had been ripped across, and now his chest and one shoulder were exposed. Loudon, gazing down at the prostrate man, started slightly, then stooped and looked more closely at the broad triangle of breast.

Abruptly Loudon turned away and resumed his seat on the bench. After a time the cook rolled over, staggered to his feet and reeled into the bunk-house without a word.

No one commented on the wrestling-match. Swing Tunstall started a cheerful reminiscence of his last trip to the Bend. Laguerre rose and passed silently round the corner of the bunk-house. Loudon, chin on hand, stared off into the distance.

Suddenly, within the bunk-house, there was the thump of feet followed in quick succession by a thud and a grunt. Out through the doorway the cook tumbled headlong, fell flat, and lay motionless, his nose in the dirt, his boot-toes on the door-sill. One outflung hand still clutched the butt of a six-shooter. From a gash on the back of his head the blood oozed slowly.

Issued then Laguerre from the doorway. The half-breed was in his stocking-feet. He wrenched the gun from the cook's fingers, stuffed the weapon into the waistband of his trousers, and squatted down on his heels.

None of the onlookers had moved. Gravely they regarded Laguerre and the cook. Loudon realized that he had narrowly escaped being shot in the back. A farce had developed into melodrama.

At this juncture Doubleday strolled leisurely out of the office. At sight of the fallen man and the serious group at the bunkhouse he quickened his steps.

"Who done it?" demanded Doubleday severely, for he believed the cook to be dead.

"I heet heem on de head wit' my gun," explained Laguerre. "Loudon she t'row de cook. De cook she geet varree mad un go een de bunk-house. I t'ink mabbeso she do somethin' un I go roun' de bunk-house, tak' off my boots, un crawl een de side window. De cook she was jus' run for door wit' hees gun een hees han'. I stop heem."

Complacently Laguerre gazed upon the still unconscious cook.

"The kyote!" exclaimed Doubleday. "That's what comes o' not havin' any sense o' humor! —— his soul! Now I got to fire him. Trouble! Trouble! Nothin' but——"

The discouraged foreman slumped down beside Loudon and rolled a cigarette with vicious energy.

Some ten minutes later the cook stirred, rolled over and sat up. He stared with dull eyes at the men on the bench. Stupidly he fingered the cut at the back of his head. As deadened senses revived and memory returned, his back stiffened, and defiance blazed up in his eyes.

"Telescope," said Loudon, "I'd take it as a favor if ye'd give him his gun—an' his cartridges."

The cook lost his defiant look when the half-breed complied with Loudon's request. Helplessly he eyed the gun a moment, then, struck with a bright idea, he waggled his right wrist and grimaced as if with pain. Gingerly he rubbed the wrist-bone.

"Sprained my wrist," he stated brazenly. "Can't shoot with my left hand nohow. If I could, I'd sure enjoy finishin' up. —— of a note this is! I start for to shoot it out with a gent, an' one o' you sports whangs me over the head an' lays me out. I'd admire to know which one o' ye done it."

"I done eet," Laguerre informed him, his white teeth flashing under his black mustache.

"I'll remember ye," said the cook with dignity. "I'll remember you too," he added, looking at Loudon. "Doubleday, I'd like my time. I ain't a-goin' to cook for this bunch no longer. An' if it's all the same to you I'll take a hoss for part o' my pay."

"Well, by ——!" exclaimed Doubleday, hugely annoyed at being thus forestalled. "You've got a nerve. You ought to be hung!"

"Any gent does who works for the Flying M," countered the cook. "But I'm quittin'. Do I get the hoss?"

"Ye bet ye do. An' yo're hittin' the trail tonight."

"The sooner the quicker."

Within half an hour Rufe Cutting, erstwhile cook at the Flying M, a bandage under his hat, mounted his horse and rode away toward Paradise Bend. As he vanished in the gathering dusk, Swing Tunstall laughed harshly.

"All yaller an' a yard wide!" observed Giant Morton, and spat contemptuously.

Loudon made no comment. He was working out a puzzle, and he was making very little headway.

IN THE morning he saddled Ranger and started for the Bend. He followed the trail for a mile or two, then, fording the Dogsoldier, he struck across the flats where a few of Mackenzie's horses grazed. He did not turn his horse's head toward Paradise Bend till the Dogsoldier was well out of rifle-range. Loudon's caution was pardonable. Rufe Cutting knew that he was to ride to the Bend, and Rufe had a rifle. Loudon had marked him tying it in his saddle-strings.

It was quite within the bounds of possibility that the cunning Rufe was at that very moment lying in wait somewhere among the cottonwoods on the bank of the Dogsoldier, for the trail in many places swung close to the creek. Decidedly, the trail was no fit route for any one at odds with a citizen of the Cutting stamp.

Loudon, when he drew near the Bend, circled back to the creek and entered the town by the Farewell trail.

He dismounted in front of the Three Card, anchored Ranger to the ground and went into the saloon. Several men were standing at the bar. They ceased talking at his entrance.

Loudon leaned both elbows on the bar and demanded liquor. He sensed a certain tenseness, a vague chill in the atmosphere. The bartender, his eyes looking anywhere but at Loudon, served him hastily. The bartender seemed nervous. Bottle and glass rattled as he placed them on the bar.

"Scotty Mackenzie come in yet?" inquired Loudon of the bartender, setting down his empty glass.

"N-no," quavered the bartender shrilly. "I ain't seen him."

Loudon stared at the bartender. What was the matter with the man? His face was the color of gray wrapping-paper. Loudon turned and glanced along the bar at the other customers. Two of them were regarding him, a rapt fascination in their expressions. Swiftly the two men averted their eyes.

Loudon hesitated an instant, then he wheeled and walked out of the saloon. As he crossed the sidewalk he noticed a group of men standing near by. He stooped to pick up his reins. When he straightened there was a sudden rustle and a whisk in his rear. Something settled over his shoulders and drew taut, pinning his arms to his sides.

"What in ——" swore Loudon, and began to struggle furiously.

He was at once jerked over on his back. He fell heavily. The shock partially stunned him. Dazedly he gazed upward into a ring of faces. The features of all save one were blurred. And that face was the face of Block, the Sheriff of Fort Creek County.

Loudon felt a tugging at his belt and knew that one was removing his six-shooter. He was pulled upright, his hands were wrenched together, and before he was aware of what was taking place, his wrists were in handcuffs. Now his faculties returned with a rush.

"What seems to be the trouble, anyway?" he demanded of the crowd in general.

"It seems yo're a hoss-thief," replied a brown-bearded man wearing a star on the left lapel of his vest.

"Who says so?"

"This gent." The brown-bearded man pointed at Block.

"It's no good talkin', Loudon," said Block, grinning after the fashion of the cat which has just eaten the canary. "I know ye. Ye stole that hoss yo're ridin' from the 88 ranch. There's the brand to prove it. But that ain't all. Ye was caught rustlin' 88 cows. Ye branded 'em Crossed Dumbbell. An' ye got away by shootin' Sam Blakely, an' holdin' up Marvin an' Rudd. I don't guess ye'll get away now in a hurry."

"Where's yore warrant?"

"Don't need no warrant."

"That's right," corroborated the brown-bearded man with the star. "Ye don't need no warrant for a hoss-thief an' a rustler. I tell ye, stranger, yo're lucky to be still alive. I'm doin' ye a favor by lettin' ye go south with Sheriff Block. By rights ye'd ought to be lynched instanter."

"Ye don't say," said Loudon gently. "Who are ye anyway?"

"Oh, I'm only the marshal here at the Bend," replied with sarcasm the brown-bearded man. "My name's Smith—Dan Smith. Ye might 'a' heard o' me."

"Sure, I've heard o' ye, an' I'd understood ye was a party with sense an' not in the habit o' believin' everythin' ye hear. Now——"

"Ye understood right," said the marshal drily. "I'm listenin' to ye now, an' I don't believe everythin' I hear."

"Yo're believin' Block, an' he's the biggest liar in Fort Creek County, an' that's sayin' quite a lot, seein' as how the 88 outfit belongs in Fort Creek. Now I never branded no 88 cows. The 88, because they knowed I knowed they'd been brandin' other folks' cattle, went an' branded a cow an' a calf o' their own with the Crossed Dumbbell an' then tried to throw the blame on me. But the trick didn't pan out. They couldn't prove it nohow. Jack Richie o' the Cross-in-a-box can tell ye I didn't rustle them cattle."

"I thought ye was workin' for the Bar-S," put in the marshal.

"I was, but I quit."

"Then why wouldn't Saltoun o' the Bar-S know all about it? What did ye say Jack Richie for?"

The marshal drooped a wise eyelid. He considered himself a most astute cross-examiner.

"I said Jack Richie because he was there at the Bar-S when Marvin an' Rudd drove in the cow an' the calf. It was him proved I couldn't 'a' branded them cattle like they said I did."

"Why wouldn't Saltoun o' the Bar-S speak for ye?" inquired the marshal.

"He would, I guess," replied Loudon. "Old Salt an' me don't just hitch, but he's square. He'd tell ye about it."

"He won't tell me. The Bar-S an' the Cross-in-a-box are more'n two hundred miles south. I ain't ridin' that far for to get yore pedigree. No, ye can just bet I ain't. This gent here, Sheriff Block, will take ye south. If it's like ye say it is, then ye needn't worry none. Ye'll have yore witnesses an' all right there."

"Don't ye understand? I'll never see none o' my friends. The 88 outfit will lynch me soon as ever I hit Farewell. I tell ye I know too much about 'em. They want me out o' the way."

Before the marshal could reply there was a bustle in the crowd, and a high-pitched feminine voice inquired what evil was being visited upon Mister Loudon. An instant later Mrs. Burr, barearmed and perspiring, unceremoniously pushed Block to one side and confronted the marshal.

"What ye doin' to him?" she demanded, with a quick jerk of her head toward Loudon.

"Why, Mis' Burr, ma'am," replied the marshal, "he's a hoss-thief, an' he's goin' south to Farewell."

"He ain't goin' to Farewell," retorted Mrs. Burr, "an' he ain't a hoss-thief. Who says so?"

"I do, ma'am," said Block stepping forward. "He's a hoss-thief, an'——"

"Hoss-thief yoreself!" snapped Mrs. Burr, wheeling on Block so fiercely that the sheriff gave ground involuntarily. "The more I look at ye the more ye look like a hoss-thief an' a rustler an' a road-agent. You shut up, Dan Smith! I always guessed ye was an idjit, an' now I know it! This man, Mr. Tom Loudon, is a friend o' my husband's. I know him well, an' if ye think yo're goin' to string him up for a hoss-thief yo're mistaken."

"But, ma'am," explained the unhappy marshal, "we ain't a-goin' to string him up. This gent, Sheriff Block, is takin' him south. He'll get justice down there, Mis' Burr."

"Will he? If the folks down there are as witless as you are he won't. Justice! Ye make me plumb weary! Did ye ask to see this Block man's warrant? Answer me! Did you?

"He ain't got no warrant," replied the marshal in a small voice.

"Ain't got no warrant!" screamed Mrs. Burr. "Ain't got no warrant, an' yo're lettin' him take away a party on just his say-so! Dan Smith, since when have ye allowed a stranger to come in an' tell you what to do? What right has this Block man from Fort Creek County to try an' run Paradise Bend, I'd like to know?"

"I ain't tryin' to run the Bend," defended Block. "I wouldn't think o' such a thing. But I want this hoss-thief, an' I mean to have him."

The words had barely passed Block's teeth when Loudon's self-control broke. With an inarticulate howl of rage he sprang at Block and drove the iron manacles into the sheriff's face.

Down went Block with Loudon on top of him. Twice, three times, before Dan Smith and two others pulled him up and away, Loudon smashed the handcuffs home. It was a bloody-faced, teeth-spitting sheriff that got slowly to his feet.

"By ——!" gibbered Block. "By ——! I'll down you here an' now!"

A tall man with square features tapped the raving sheriff on the shoulder.

"Don't cuss no more before a lady," advised the square-featured man. "An' don't go draggin' at no gun. This ain't Fort Creek County. Yo're in Paradise Bend, an' I just guess ye won't beef any sport with his hands tied. This goes as it lays."

From the crowd came murmurs of approval. Public opinion was changing front. Mrs. Burr smiled serenely.

"Yo're a real gent, Jim Mace," she said, addressing the square-featured man. "I always knowed you'd protect a defenseless female. Dan Smith," she continued, turning to the marshal, "unlock them handcuffs."

Dan Smith hesitated. Then Block spoiled his own case. He seized Loudon by the shoulders. Loudon promptly kicked him in the skins and endeavored to repeat his former assault with the handcuffs. But the two men holding him wrestled him backward.

"Do I get him?" bellowed Block, rabid with pain, for Loudon had kicked him with all his strength. "Do I get him, or are ye goin' to let a woman tell ye what to do?"

Jim Mace stepped close to the sheriff.

"Stranger," said Mace sharply, "you've done chattered enough. In yore own partic'lar hog-waller ye may be a full-size toad, but up here yo're half o' nothin'. Understand?"

The sheriff looked about him wildly. The Paradise-Benders, cold, unfriendly, some openly hostile, stared back. Wrought up though he was, the sheriff had wit enough to perceive that he was treading close to the edge of a volcano. The sheriff subsided.

"Dan," said Mace, "it's come to a showdown. It's the word o' Mis' Burr agin' Block's. There's only one answer. If I was you I'd unlock them handcuffs."

"Yo're right, Jim," agreed the marshal. "I will."

"Gimme my gun," demanded Loudon, when his hands were free.

"In a minute," parried the marshal. "Sheriff, if I was you I'd hit the trail. Yore popularity ain't more'n deuce-high just now."

"I'll go," glowered Block. "But I'll be back. An' when I come I'll have a warrant. I reckon the sheriff o' Sunset will honor it, even if you won't."

"Bring on yore warrant," retorted the marshal.

THE rumble of wheels and thud of hoofs attracted Loudon's attention. Over the heads of the crowd he saw the high sides of a tarpaulin-covered wagon and, sitting on the driver's seat, Captain Benjamin Burr and Scotty Mackenzie.

"Hi, Cap'n Burr! Hi, Scotty!" shouted Loudon.

"Where are they?" exclaimed Mrs. Burr, her harsh features lighting up. "Oh, there they are! You Benjamin Burr, come right in here this instant. Yore wife wants yore help!"

Captain Burr swayed back on the reins. Dragging a sawed-off shotgun he hopped to the ground, Scotty Mackenzie at his heels. The crowd made way for them. Captain Burr swept off his hat and bowed ceremoniously to his wife.

"My love," said he, "in what way may I assist you?"

"That party," sniffed Mrs. Burr, leveling a long forefinger at the wretched Block, "comes up an' accuses Mr. Tom Loudon here o' bein' a rustler an' a hoss-thief. Says he's been brandin' 88 cows an' that he stole that chestnut hoss yonder."

The sawed-off shotgun, an eight-gauge Greener, covered Block's belt buckle.

"Suh, you lie," said Burr simply.

"What did I tell all you folks?" cried Mrs. Burr triumphantly.

Block made no attempt to draw. He folded his arms and glared ferociously. He found glaring difficult, for he knew that he did not look in the least ferocious.

"I'm doin' my duty," he said sullenly.

"Gentlemen all, I'd like some show in this," pleaded Loudon. "Just gimme back my gun, an' me an' Block'll shoot it out."

"Wait a shake," said Scotty, sliding between Loudon and Block. "Let me get the straight of this. You accuse Loudon here of brandin' 88 cattle?"

"Sure," insisted the stubborn Block, "an' he stole that chestnut hoss he's ridin', too. Just look at the 88 brand. It's plain as day."

"Suh," burst out Burr, "I happened to be at the 88 ranch the day my friend Tom Loudon bought that chestnut hoss. I saw him pay Blakely. Everybody in Fo't Creek County knows that Tom Loudon has owned that hoss fo' upwa'ds of a yeah. You know it, you —— rascal! Don't attempt to deny it!"

To this sweeping assertion Block made no reply.

"I guess now that settles half the cat-hop," said Scotty. "The other half I know somethin' about myself. Jack Richie o' the Cross-in-a-box told me. It was thisaway:"

And Scotty related the tale of Marvin and Rudd and the Crossed Dumbbell cow and calf.

"Now what ye got to say?" Scotty demanded of Block, when the story was told.

"What can I do?" snapped Block. "It's a whole town agin' one man. I'll get a warrant, an' ye can gamble on that. If I thought I'd get a square deal, I'd admire to shoot it out."

"Gimme my gun," begged Loudon. "Gimme it, or lend me one, somebody. He wants to shoot it out."

"No," said Scotty firmly, "it's gone beyond shootin'. Block knowed you was innocent. He couldn't help knowin' it. He tried to work such a sneakin', low-down trick that killin' don't seem to fit somehow. He'd ought to be rode on a rail or buried up to his neck or somethin'."

"Tar an' feather him," suggested Mrs. Burr.

"We ain't got no tar," said Jim Mace, "an' there ain't a chicken in the place."

"There's molasses an' goose-hair quilts in the Chicago Store," said Mrs. Burr helpfully. "What more do ye want?"

Molasses and feathers! Here was an extravagant shame! Block's hand swept downward. But no smooth revolver-butt met his clutching fingers. A far-seeing soul, had, in the confusion, adroitly removed the sheriff's six-shooter.

In all seriousness the men of Paradise Bend set about their work. They saw no humor in the shriekingly grotesque business. Sheriff Block essayed to struggle. But Scotty and other leading citizens attached themselves to his arms and legs and pulled him down and sat upon him.

When one came running with a five-gallon jug of molasses Block, uttering strange cries, was spread-eagled. From his forehead to his feet the molasses was thickly applied. When the front of him had been thoroughly daubed, he was rolled over upon a ripped-up quilt—this so that none of the molasses might be wasted—and a fresh jug was brought into play.

Dripping like a buckwhat cake, writhing in an agony of shame, Block was rolled up in the quilt. Then the quilt was torn away and men showered upon him the contents of other quilts. The Paradise Benders used up ten gallons of molasses and three quilts on Block, and they made a complete job. Awful was the wreck that staggered down the street.

Somehow the sheriff contrived to reach the stable where he had left his horse, and somehow—for his movements were the movements of one far gone in drink—he threw on the saddle and passed the cinch-straps. Mounting with difficulty, he rode away. None offered to molest him further.

CHAPTER X

THE HORSE-THIEF

LOUDON, who had taken no part in the feathering, watched the departure of the sheriff with brooding eyes. He did not agree with Scotty Mackenzie and the citizens of the Bend. In his estimation the punishment had not been sufficiently drastic. Alive and in possession of all his faculties the sheriff was a great power for evil. He would seek revenge.

Loudon swore softly. He was far from being a bloodthirsty man, but he regarded the killing of Block as a duty. And he did not believe in putting off till some future date what could be accomplished today.

"It's quite a list," he said to himself. "Block, Rufe Cutting, Blakely, an' the whole 88 outfit. An' they won't be happy till they get me. It kind o' looks as if Blakely ain't expectin' to keep our little engagement in Farewell. Block wouldn't 'a' come up here, without Blakely sent him."

Thoughts of Blakely quite naturally induced thoughts of Pete O'Leary. Where was O'Leary? Loudon recollected that he had not seen O'Leary in the crowd. He looked up and down the street. O'Leary was nowhere in sight. His absence was a small thing in itself, but it might signify a guilty conscience. Loudon wondered.

That disreputable person, Scotty Mackenzie, approached, leading his horse.

"Tom," said Scotty, his blue eyes twinkling, "don't look so downhearted. He wasn't worth shootin'."

"I dunno, Scotty," replied Loudon. "It'll come to it some day, or I miss my guess."

"Ye'll miss it while yo're workin' for me. Block won't never come to the Bend again, an' ye can go the limit on that. D'je get the mail?"

"I ain't been to the post-office. Didn't have time. I've been right busy ever since I sifted in."

"I'll get it then. Cap'n Burr wants ye to eat dinner at his house. I'll drift round later. Better finish up what ye come to town for before ye eat."

"I come to town to meet you."

"To meet me!" exclaimed Scotty. "Now look here, Tom, do I look like I need a gardeen?"

"Didn't ye write to Doubleday," said the bewildered Loudon, "tellin' him to send me in to meet ye here today an' for me to ride my own hoss?"

"What are ye talkin' about? Me write Doubleday! I should say not!"

"Well, all I know is Doubleday got a letter from ye, an' it was mailed in Rocket."

"Mailed in Rocket! Why, I never was in Rocket! It's just luck me bein' here today. If I hadn't met Ben Burr down at the Wagonwheel I wouldn't 'a' come for another couple o' days, mebbe."

"It's —— funny. That letter from Rocket is no dream."

"I hope Doubleday saves the letter. Well, you go on an' eat. See ye later."

Loudon swung into the saddle and galloped to the house of Captain Burr. On the doorsill Dorothy Burr and Pete O'Leary sat side by side. As Loudon dismounted Miss Burr rose to meet him.

"Oh, Mr. Loudon!" she exclaimed, "I've just heard about your frightful experience. I wish I'd been there. I'd have enjoyed seeing them plaster up that brute of a sheriff."

"He did look kind o' odd," said Loudon. "Yore ma sure saved my life."

"Wasn't it luck ma was down street? I usually go myself, but this morning Mr. O'Leary came, so ma went. We didn't know there was anything going on till ma came back and told us, and then it was all over. My! I'd like to have seen ma talking to that stupid Dan Smith. The big idiot! Ma's mad yet. Oh, I forgot. Have you met Mr. O'Leary?"

"I know him," said Loudon rather ungraciously, and nodded to the gentleman in question. "I guess I'll put the little hoss in the corral."

"Yes, do. Pa's out there. Dinner'll be ready soon."

Miss Burr returned to the doorsill, and Loudon led away Ranger. So Pete O'Leary had been spending the morning at the Burrs'! It would be interesting to know why the engaging O'Leary had chosen to call upon that particular morning. Was it because he did not wish to identify himself in any way with Sheriff Block? Was it the guilty conscience?

"Well, suh," smiled Captain Burr, who was kneeling at the feet of one of his horses, "well, suh, it went against the grain to let that scoundrel go in peace, didn't it?"

Loudon smiled grimly.

"I appreciate youah feelings in the matteh, Tom," continued the Captain. "Such a pe'son should not be allowed to live. My impulse was to shoot him, but I stayed my hand. As I may have mentioned befo', I am growing soft-heahted. That's right, Tom, cuss away. If Block were otheh than he is, he would shoot himself. No gentleman would care to live afteh being ta'd and feathe'd. But Block will writhe onwa'd like the snake he is till he is crushed once fo' all.

"Do you remembeh what I said the day you made him quit right in the street in Fa'ewell? Well, suh, in o'deh to regain the respect of the town he did kill a man—an inoffensive strangeh."

"Ye might know it. He'll be a reg'lar 'Billy the Kid' before a great while."

"Not quite. The Lincoln County young man was a wa'-eagle. Block's a buzza'd. Tom, I'm afraid this Jeffe'son Davis hoss is developing a wind-puff."

Loudon made no reply. He was watching an approaching rider. The horseman passed by without a glance toward the corral and loped on into town.

Now the road in front of the Burr house was the beginning of the trail to the Flying M ranch, and the mounted man was none other than Rufe Cutting. It was evident to Loudon that he had not underestimated the cook. He resolved to seek out his would-be bushwhacker immediately.

Loudon looked quickly down at the Captain. If Burr had perceived Loudon's absorption he gave no sign. He merely requested Loudon's opinion of the slight swelling on Jefferson Davis's near fore.

"Ye've got to excuse me, Cap'n," said Loudon hastily. "I've got a little business to attend to before I eat."

"Need any help?" inquired Burr, reaching for his Greener.

"No, thanks," replied Loudon, swiftly resaddling Ranger.

"Dinner!" called Mrs. Burr, sticking her head out of the kitchen door a moment later. "Why, where's Tom Loudon?"

"He's gone away," grumbled her husband, regretfully eying his shotgun.

"Well, of all things! Just as dinner's ready! Don't he know he's eatin here? Will he be gone long?"

"He may not be away twenty minutes, and then on the otheh hand, he may neveh retuhn."

"Never return! What are you talkin' about, Benjamin Burr?"

"Wait and see, my love, wait and see," rejoined the Captain, and went in to dinner.

LOUDON meanwhile had galloped down to the corner of Main Street. Rufe Cutting was not in sight. But his horse was standing among the horses in front of the Jacks Up Saloon. Loudon rode across the street and dismounted behind a freighter's wagon near the Chicago Store, where he could not be observed from the windows of the Jacks Up. Then he walked briskly up the street and entered the saloon.

Rufe Cutting, his scratched features cast in sullen lines, was drinking at the bar. So were several other men. A knot of citizens in Cutting's immediate rear were discussing the events of the morning. Two faro tables were crowded. The Jacks Up was in full blast. With the place crowded a gun-play was apt to result in damage to the bystanders.

However, the choice lay with Cutting. Loudon would allow the first move.

With this intention, Loudon edged up to the bar and called for a drink. At the sound of his voice Cutting turned a slow head. There were two men in between, but they were not standing close to the bar.

Loudon, watching Cutting out of his eye-corners, picked up his glass with his left hand. Even as he did so, panic seized Cutting. His fingers closed on his own full glass and he hurled it at Loudon's head.

Involuntarily Loudon dodged. When he recovered himself his gun was out.

The bartender promptly vanished under the bar. Men skipped and dodged and flung themselves over tables and chairs in their anxiety to give Loudon a clear line of fire. But Cutting had disappeared.

Two swearing men sprawling under an open rear window told the story. In his fear-stricken efforts to escape, Cutting had knocked them both down.

Loudon and the two men, one of whom was Jim Mace and the other Dan Smith, went through the window almost simultaneously. Both sashes went with them to a brave accompaniment of crackling glass.

Loudon landed on his knees, and was in time for a snapshot at a leg sliding over a window-sill of the house next door. Before Loudon could rise Mace and the marshal tumbled over him. The three fell in a tangle and rolled among tin cans and bottles for a space of time. When at last, red-faced and almost breathless, they rushed the house next door they were stopped by an angry woman brandishing a frying-pan.

"You drunk hunkers can't come through here!" screamed the irate lady. "If you an' yore fool friends want to play tag ye can play here in the street! What do ye mean by bustin' into folks' houses an' wakin' my baby up? You idjits! She'll be bawlin' her brains out all day now!"

"We're after a hold-up!" cried Loudon with great presence of mind.

It had the desired effect.

"Why didn't ye say so at first? Come right in."

Through the house and out of the front door they dashed. Drifting clouds of dust marked Cutting's line of flight. He was a quarter of a mile distant, racing for the ford of the Dogsoldier and the Farewell trail. The marshal fired a futile shot. Loudon laughed and holstered his six-shooter.

"Look at him go!" he chuckled. "Scared stiff."

"Get yore hosses!" commanded the marshal. "Don't stand here gassin'! We'll go after him right away!"

"Oh, let him go," drawled Loudon. "He ain't worth chasin'."

"But he's a road-agent, ain't he?" said Jim Mace.

"No, I just said he was," grinned Loudon. "He ain't nothin' but a right good cook, so far as I know."

"Ain't he done nothin'?" inquired the perplexed marshal.

"Only jerked a glass of whisky at me," replied Loudon. "Ye see, I ain't right popular with him."

"From the way he's splittin' the breeze," said Jim Mace, "it looks like he don't care for yore society none."

"I'd ought to go after him," grunted the marshal vengefully, tenderly feeling a skinned elbow. "I don't mind a reg'lar gun-play, but this here chuckin' glasses 'round promiscuous an' bumpin' folks over ain't right. It's agin' law an' order. He'd ought to be arrested. The calaboose's been empty for a week, too."

Loudon left Jim Mace and Dan Smith explaining matters to the gathering crowd, and walked back to where he had left his horse. Ranger was not behind the freighter's wagon. Loudon ran into the Chicago Store.

"Sure," said the proprietor. "I seen a feller climbin' aboard that hoss a few minutes ago. Seemed in a hurry, too. What? Yore hoss!"

The proprietor ducked under the counter for his spurs and his rifle, and Loudon hurried out. Cutting's mount, the bay he had bought from Doubleday, was of course standing where he had been left among the other horses. Loudon threw the dropped reins over the bay's head and swung up.

"He's a hoss-thief!" he shouted to Dan Smith and Jim Mace. "He got away on my hoss!"

Quirting and spurring, Loudon tore down the street. Before his horse's hoofs spattered the water of the ford the proprietor of the Chicago Store and the marshal were galloping in his wake. Jim Mace and a score of others followed at intervals. A horse was not stolen in Paradise Bend every day. The inhabitants were bent on making the most of their opportunity.

The bay was a good horse, but Ranger was the better, and Loudon knew it—knew too that, unless Ranger fell down, Cutting would escape.

"Ranger's good for all day," groaned Loudon. "All day, an' not strain himself a little bit."

As the bay flashed across the top of a rise two miles beyond the Dogsoldier, Loudon glimpsed two specks four miles ahead.

"Block! He's with Block!" exclaimed Loudon, and drove in the spurs.

The bay leaped madly forward and rocketed down the long slope. A high-lipped swell concealed the two specks, and for a long ten minutes Loudon rode between the sides of the draw. The bay charged at the high-lipped swell with undiminished vigor. He was doing his level best, but his gait was tied in. It bore not the remotest resemblance to Ranger's free-swinging stride. When Loudon reached the crest of the swell the specks had vanished.

He put the reins between his teeth and drew the Winchester from the scabbard under his right leg. He threw down the lever a trifle. There was a cartridge in the chamber.

The loading gate resisted the pressure of his thumb. There was at least one cartridge in the magazine, but by the weight of the rifle he judged it to be fully loaded. Loudon returned the Winchester to its scabbard and slowed the willing little bay to a lope.

"Yo're all right, old hoss," he said, "but ye can't never catch that hoss o' mine. Not in a million years. We just got to wait till he stops."

Rufe Cutting could have devised no better revenge than the stealing of Loudon's horse. Since Loudon had owned Ranger no one save himself and Kate Saltoun had ridden him. Ranger's legs were frequently hand-rubbed. Ranger was curried.

With his fingers—no true horseman would dream of using the comb of commerce—Loudon frequently combed Ranger's mane and tail. When a horse in the cow country is curried and combed, that horse is a highly valued horse. Johnny Ramsey accused Loudon of wrapping Ranger in blankets when the air was chilly, and of taking his temperature on all occasions. Undoubtedly Loudon was somewhat of a crank where Ranger was concerned.

And now the inconceivable had come to pass. Ranger had been stolen—stolen almost under the very nose of his master. Loudon did not swear. His feeling was too deeply grim for that. But he promised himself an accounting—a very full accounting.

Loudon rode onward at a steady lope. Before him stretched the dusty ribbon of trail. Blank and bare it led between the low hills and lifted over the ridges. He saw no more specks ahead. The quarry had outdistanced him.

Fifteen miles out of Paradise Bend he heard a faint shout in his rear. He looked over his shoulder. A half-mile distant two men were galloping toward him. One of them waved an arm half red, half blue.

"Scotty," muttered Loudon, and checked his horse.

The two clattered up, their horses' outblown nostrils whistling. One of the men was the owner of the Flying M. The other was the proprietor of the Chicago Store.

"Seen him?" demanded Scotty.

"Once," replied Loudon. "He's ridin' with Block now, but they pulled away from me. I ain't seen 'em for over an hour."

"They're stickin' to the trail," grunted the store proprietor, who rejoiced in the name of Ragsdale, glancing at the hoofmarks in the dust.

"C'mon!" snapped Scotty Mackenzie.

Three miles farther on Ragsdale's mount began to falter.

"He's done," growled Ragsdale. "Give 'em one for me."

Ragsdale halted. Loudon and Scotty Mackenzie rode on.

"Where did ye get that bay?" queried Scotty, eying the Flying M brand on the bay's hip.

"It was his—Cutting's," replied Loudon.

"Cutting's? D'ye mean Rufe Cutting is the hoss-thief?"

"Sure! I clean forgot ye didn't know about Cutting's quittin' his job."

Loudon explained the manner of the cook's departure and his subsequent actions to Mackenzie.

"An'," said Loudon, in conclusion, "I seen that feller at the 88 that time I bought my hoss from Blakely."

"Ye did! Are ye sure?"

"Sure as yo're a day old. I was walkin' past the bunk-house with Blakely, an' this fellah was out in front with his shirt off a-washin' himself, an' I seen an eagle tattooed on his chest in blue, an' underneath a heart with a R on one side an' a T on the other. Just before yore cook pulled his freight his shirt got tore, an' I seen his chest, an' there was the eagle an' the heart an' the two letters R an' T. I knowed when I first laid eyes on him, up here at the Flyin' M, that I'd seen him some'ers, but I couldn't place him till I seen the tattoo-work. It all come back to me then."

"What was his name at the 88?"

"I never knowed. I never cut his trail again down there. He wasn't one o' the reg'lar outfit. I know all o' them."

"Did Cap'n Burr see him?"

"No, he didn't. I remember now, when the Cap'n come this fellah wasn't in sight, an' he didn't show up again while we was there. Cap'n Burr left when I did."

"Cutting worked for me nigh onto a year. He's always earned his pay. Never done nothin' out of the way."

"I dunno what it means. It's all a heap mysterious — special mysterious when ye come to think o' what O'Leary asked me when I first hit the Bend. 'Couldn't Sam come?' says O'Leary to me. Busts out into the street to say it, too, right after I'd asked ye the way to Cap'n Burr's house."

"I remember," said Scotty thoughtfully. "I seen him talkin' to ye. I thought ye knowed him. I wonder who he took ye for?"

"One o' Blakely's outfit, o' course," replied Loudon. "It was that 88 brand o' Ranger's done the trick for him like it done for you. 'Couldn't Sam come,' says he. Then he says, 'It's all right. I'm Pete O'Leary!' When he seen I didn't understand him none, he got gun-shy immediate an' wandered. An' he didn't forget me a little bit. Telescope told me that he'd been tryin' to find out if you'd hired me. One day he come out to the ranch an' stopped just long enough to say howdy. Wanted to make sure I was there, see? What do ye make of it?"

"Nothin'—yet. We got to wait an' see what happens."

"Seein' what happens may be expensive. I tell ye flat, Scotty, Sam Blakely has got somethin' under the table for ye. He's aimin' to put a crimp in ye. Ye can go the limit on that."

"There ain't nothin' certain about it."

"O' course there ain't. Sam ain't goin' to give himself away. I wish you'd let me Injun 'round some an' see what's up. I think, maybe ye'll save money if ye do."

"Well, I dunno—" hesitated Scotty.

"O' course," said Loudon quickly, "Blakely's got it in for me. But whatever he's cookin' up for you, he thought of before I ever rode north. My comin' north has sort o' upset his plans. He knows I know all about him, an' he wants to shut my mouth before he turns his bull loose."

"Yo're goin' to meet him in Farewell, ain't ye? Seems to me Richie said somethin' about it."

"Sure I am, but what's that got to do with it?"

"Why, maybe that's the reason he wants ye out of the way. He may not hanker after shootin' it out with ye."

"No, Sam Blakely ain't afraid," denied Loudon. "He wouldn't object any to meetin' me in Farewell if that was all there was to it. No, what's worryin' him is me bein' here at the Flying M. An' it's worryin' him a lot, or he'd never 'a' sent Block two hundred miles."

"Well, I dunno. Ye may be right, Tom, but I don't just guess Sam Blakely will try to put any crimps in me. He knows it would come kind o' high. O' course it's mighty puzzlin'. I don't understand it none. One thing, Blakely sure tried his best to get ye down on the Lazy River, an' that's why it looks to me like Block was sent to put in the last licks."

"He was, but not the way ye think. I could gas my head off about Blakely up here in the Bend, an' it wouldn't matter a —— so long as he was down on the Lazy. But if he left the Lazy an' come projeckin' up to the Bend, then what I'd be sayin' would count a lot. See now?"

"I see," admitted Scotty.

"Well, gimme a chance to find out what he's up to."

"No, Tom, there's too much to do at the ranch. I can't let ye go. Yo're too good a man. I need ye right at home. We'll wait an' see what happens. Then we'll know what to do."

"I may be too late then," grumbled Loudon.

"If it is, then blame me. I'm the one to lose anyway."

"Ye sure are."

Oh, the denseness of ranch owners! Was Scotty Mackenzie to turn out another Saltoun?

"It's a blind trail," observed Scotty, picking up the tangled thread of their discourse. "Some things kind o' fit when ye look at 'em one way, an' then again they don't when ye look at 'em another. Cutting don't fit, none whatever. All the time he worked for me, he only went to town twice, an' the last time was six months ago. O'Leary never come to see him, so if somethin's up like ye say there is, Rufe's out of it. But that won't help him none now. He'll go out if we ever come up with him."

"If we do," supplemented Loudon.

"My idea exactly. That hoss o' yores can sure wriggle along, an' he had a big start."

"I'm goin' through to Rocket anyhow."

"Me too."

Till the latter half of the afternoon they kept the ponies loping. Then, slowing to a walk, they risked a short-cut, and did not strike the trail till the sun was setting.

"Still keepin' together," announced Loudon, after one look at the trail.

"An' still hittin' the high places," said Scotty. "Them two cayuses sure have bottom. Cutting knowed a good hoss all right."

CHAPTER XI

ROCKET

THE two men reached Rocket before midnight and rode up to the door of the combination saloon and hotel. While Scotty hammered on the planks with his fist, Loudon uttered stentorian yells. Rocket, male and female, awoke, poked their heads out of the windows and shrilly demanded information.

"Hoss-thief!" bawled Loudon. "He's ridin' a long-legged chestnut with a white spot on his nose! Fellah with him on a black horse! The sport on the black may or may not be dressed like a bird, accordin' to whether he's washed himself! Have ye seen 'em?"

Rocket with one voice assured Loudon that he was drunk, and advised the watering-trough.

"I ain't foolin'," expostulated Loudon. "The gent on the black cayuse, which his name is Block, sheriff o' Fort Creek County, was tarred an' feathered in Paradise Bend this afternoon."

Partisan Rocket cheered, and, in the same breath, grieved that neither of the fugitives had been seen, and clamored to know details of the tarring and feathering. Rocket was in Sunset County, and it was delightful to hear that Fort Creek, in the person of its sheriff, had been insulted.

Loudon, sitting at ease on his weary, drooping-headed pony, told the tale. He carefully refrained, however, from mentioning his own leading part in the affair. Rocket received the story with howls of mirth. Later, the male portion stuffed its nightshirts into trousers, pulled on boots, and gathered three deep around Loudon and Scotty while the two devoured cold beef and beans in the dining-room of the hotel.

"Glad to see yo're feelin' better over yore hoss," observed Scotty, when the last Rocketer had departed.

"Oh, I made 'em laugh," said Loudon dismally. "But it didn't make me feel like laughin' a little bit. I feel just as bad as ever—worse, if anythin'. Why, Scotty, that hoss could do everythin' but talk."

"Sure," said Scotty hastily, "but we can't do nothin' now. We've done all we could. They didn't come through Rocket, that's certain. They've done turned off some'ers. We can't trail 'em tonight, an' by tomorrow they'll be forty mile off. There's no use in keepin' it up."

Scotty looked anxiously at Loudon. The latter made no reply. He was staring at the lamp on the table, his expression bitter in the extreme.

"Tell ye what," hazarded Scotty. "Ye can have that bay yo're ridin'. He ain't like yore reg'lar hoss, but he's a good pony. Look at the way he went today. Got bottom, that hoss has. Go till the Gulf o' Mexico freezes solid."

"That's right good o' ye, Scotty, but I couldn't take him off ye thataway. I might buy him some day."

"The offer goes as it lays. Ye don't have to buy him. He's yores whenever ye want him. Well, what are ye figurin' on doin'?"

"It's no use chasin' 'em any more now. I know that. Might as well wander back where we come from. Later, two or three weeks maybe, I'm goin' south."

"Goin' south!" Scotty was aghast. He did not wish to lose his best man.

"Yep. Goin' south. Don't expect to find Cutting first off. But I'll find Block, an' I guess he'll know somethin' about friend Cutting. I'd go instanter, only I want to give Block time to get back an' get settled before I pay him a call. I tell ye, Scotty, I want that hoss o' mine, an' I'll get him back if it takes me the rest o' my life!"

"You gents want beds?" inquired the landlord, suddenly appearing in the doorway.

"Sure," replied Scotty. "Two of 'em."

"Say, who's the postmaster here?" Loudon asked.

"Me," was the landlord's weary reply.

"A couple o' days ago," said Loudon, "a letter addressed to Frank Doubleday in Paradise Bend was mailed here. Remember who mailed it?"

"Couldn't say, stranger," yawned the landlord. "Oh, sure," he added, as Loudon looked incredulous, "I could tell ye everybody else what mailed mail for the last month. But that one letter I couldn't. I didn't see the man, woman, child, or Injun, what mailed it. Three days ago when I got up in the mornin' an' went outside to wash my face I done found that letter an' two bits a-layin' on the door-step. That's all. Just a letter an' two bits. I clamps on a stamp an' sends her along when the up-stage pulls in."

"Any parties from the Bend in town that day, or the day before?"

"Nary a party as I knows of—but then I ain't got eyes all over me. Some sport might 'a' slid through an' me not know it."

"I ain't askin' questions just to make talk," said Loudon sharply. "So if ye ain't got no real serious objections I'll ask a couple more."

"No need to get het, stranger," soothed the landlord. "No need to get het. Ask away."

"Any strangers been in town lately?"

"Two, today. They're the only strangers I've seen for quite a spell, an' they're upstairs now. Lady an' gent they are, travelin' separate. Goin' to the Bend I reckon. Yest'day the off hind wheel o' the stage dished down at Lew's Gully, an' she come in on three wheels an' half a cottonwood. Passengers had to stay over till Whisky Jim rustled him a new wheel. Whisky'll pull out in the mornin', I reckon."

"Who's the gent?"

"Drummer. Dunno his name."

"Didn't Block—you know, Sheriff Block o' Fort Creek—didn't he stop here a day or two ago? He must 'a' come through Rocket."

"Sure he did. But he ain't no stranger. I see him as many as two or three times a year. Sure he come through Rocket. He had a drink here day before yest'day. Goin' to the Bend, he said."

"Well, if he stops on his way back tell him Tom Loudon was askin' for him. Old friend o' mine, the Sheriff is. Just tell him ye know me, an' he'll set 'em up for the whole town."

"I expect," grinned the landlord. "Was you wantin' beds, gents?"

"That's us," grunted Scotty. "Me, I'm asleep from the neck down. Show me that bed, Mister."

Loudon, sitting on the edge of his sway-backed cot, pulled off his boots, dropped them clattering on the floor, and looked across at Scotty Mackenzie.

"Block didn't send that letter—or write it," he said, sliding his long body under the blanket.

"How do ye know?" came in muffled tones from Scotty.

"He ain't got the brains. No sir, some gent in Paradise Bend sent that letter, an' I think I know his name."

"Who is he?" Scotty was plainly striving to keep awake, and making a poor job of it.

"I'll tell ye after we get back to the Bend."

NEXT morning, while the east was yet lemon and gray, the thunderous clamor of a beaten dish-pan reverberated through the hotel. The hideous din ceased abruptly, and the voice of the landlord became audible.

"Ye half-witted idjit! Don't ye know better'n to beat that pan when there's a lady in the house? Dish-pans is for common folks, an' don't ye forget it! Now you hump yourself up-stairs an' bang on her door right gentle, an' tell her the stage is due to pull out in a hour."

"Must be a real lady," commented Loudon, when a door at the other end of the corridor had been duly rapped upon.

"Must be," said Scotty in a singularly joyless tone. "Ye couldn't hear what she said to the feller. Reg'lar female ladies always talk so ye got to ask 'em to say it again, they carry fancy-colored umbrellas when the sun shines, an' they pack their gold specs on the end of a stick. They watch ye eat, too. I know 'em. Ye bet I do.

"I met a pair of 'em once when they was visitin' at the Seven Lazy Seven. They made me so nervous a-lookin' at me that I cut the roof o' my mouth three times with my knife. Reg'lar ladies don't make me feel to home nohow. I'm goin' down now an' eat before this one scampers in an' spoils my appetite."

So saying, Scotty almost ran from the room, buckling on his cartridge-belt as he went.

The drummer was at the table when the two Flying M men sat down. An impressive person was the drummer. He was known in his own circle as a "perfectly elegant dresser." If the tightest of tight-fitting suits, the gaudiest of shirts, the highest of collars, an explosive cravat, two watch-chains, a bartender's curl, and a perpetual leer make for elegance, that drummer was elegant to a degree.

The three had nearly finished breakfast when there came a tapping of quick heels on the stairs. Scotty Mackenzie groaned. The drummer hastily patted his curl and broadened his leer. Loudon raised his eyes and gasped audibly. His knife and fork rattled on the plate. For the woman entering the room was Kate Saltoun.

"Good morning, Tom," said Kate brightly, quite as if she and he, the best of friends, had parted the previous evening.

The nonplused Loudon mumbled unintelligibly, but accomplished a passable greeting by the time Kate had seated herself directly opposite. The drummer glanced contemptuously at Loudon and, with a flourish and a killing ogle, handed the bread to Kate. Miss Saltoun helped herself, nodded casual thanks, and bestowed a ravishing smile on Loudon.

"I'm awfully glad to see you again, Tom," she declared, buttering her bread. "It's just like old times, isn't it?"

Could this smiling young girl be Kate

Saltoun? Was this the Kate that had called him names and broken his heart and driven him from the Lazy River? Loudon furtively pinched himself. The pinch hurt.

It was not all a dream then. Kate Saltoun, in the flesh, and separated from him by not more than four feet of scaly oilcloth, was actually smiling at him. Words failed Loudon. He could do nothing but gaze.

Scotty, fearful of an introduction, oozed from the table. The drummer, unused to being ignored, fidgeted. He cleared his throat raucously. He would show this dumb person in chaps how a gentleman comports himself in the presence of a lady. It was the drummer's first trip West.

"Beautiful day, Miss, beautiful," he smirked, tilting back in his chair, and rattling his watch-chains. "We should have a quick trip to Paradise Bend. Our driver, I understand, has procured another wheel, and——"

The full-voiced utterance died abruptly.

For Kate had looked imploringly at Loudon, and Loudon had swung about to face the drummer. For the first time in his life the drummer realized how cold, how utterly daunting, a pair of human eyes could be.

"You through?" demanded Loudon.

The drummer endured that disconcerting stare while a man might draw three breaths. Then his eyelids quivered, dropped, and a curious mottled pallor overspread his countenance. He glanced up, met again that disconcerting stare, and quickly looked elsewhere.

"You through?" repeated Loudon.

"I—I don't know as that's any of your business," said the drummer faintly.

"Git out," ordered Loudon.

"Why, look here! By what right——"

"Git out." Loudon had not raised his voice.

The drummer glanced at Miss Saltoun. She was crumbling her bread and looking over his head with an air of intense boredom. So far as she was concerned, he had ceased to exist. And she had been so friendly and companionable on the long ride from Farewell.

"You've done kept me waitin' some time," suggested Loudon softly.

Awkwardly, for he found his knees strangely weak, the drummer rose. With a lame attempt at jauntiness he pulled down his vest, shot his cuffs and teetered from the room. He made his way to the bar and called for whisky. His nerves *were* rather upset.

"Jake's put yore stuff in the stage," announced the landlord, who was also the bartender.

"Then Jake can take my bags out again," said the drummer disagreeably. "I'm staying over till tomorrow."

"Well, hotel-keepers can't afford to be particular," the landlord said unsmilingly. "But ye'll have to unload yore truck yore own self."

The drummer would have enjoyed cursing the landlord. But the latter had the same peculiar look about the eyes that Loudon had. The drummer went out into the street, thinking evil thoughts of these unamiable Westerners.

KATE, when the drummer left the room, smiled sweetly upon Loudon. It was his reward for ridding her of a pest. She did not know that Loudon's prime reason for squelching the drummer was practically the same reason that impels the average man, on receiving an unpleasant surprise, to throw things at the cat.

"How's Johnny Ramsay gettin' along?" inquired Loudon.

"He has completely recovered," Kate replied. "He went back to the Cross-in-a-box four days ago."

"That's good. I'm sure glad to hear it."

Paying no further attention to Kate, Loudon calmly proceeded to finish his breakfast. Kate began to find the silence painful.

"Why, Tom," said she, "aren't you even a little bit glad to see me?"

"Why should I be glad?" parried Loudon.

"You're not very polite, Tom. You—you make me feel very badly. Why, oh why, do you persist in making it so hard for me?"

Kate's voice was pitched low, and there was a running sob in it. But Loudon was not in the least affected.

"Last time I seen ye," Loudon stated deliberately, "ye told me flat ye never wanted to see me again. Ye was engaged to Sam Blakely, too. I don't understand ye a little bit."

"Perhaps you will when I explain. You see, I am no longer engaged to Mr. Blakely."

"Yo're lucky."

"I think so myself. Under the circumstances, can't we be friends again? I didn't mean what I said, boy. Truly I didn't."

Loudon was looking at Kate, but he did not see her as she sat there in her chair, her black eyes imploring. Instead, he saw her as she appeared that day in the kitchen of the Bar-S, when she wiped his kiss from her mouth and ordered him to leave her.

"Yo're too many for me," he said at last. "I dunno what yo're drivin' at. But if ye want to be friends, why, I'm the last fellah in the world to be yore enemy. Ye know I never have exactly disliked ye, Kate. Well, I got to be weavin' along. Glad to have seen ye, Kate. I'll see ye later, maybe."

"Of course you will, Tom. I'll be at Lil's —Mrs. Mace, you know, at the Bend. You will come and see me, won't you?"

"Sure I will, an' glad to."

Loudon dropped the lady's hand as if it had been a hot iron, and departed. He had no intention of going near the house of Mrs. Mace. He never wanted to see Kate Saltoun again.

In the street he found Scotty nervously awaiting him.

"Git yore hoss," said Scotty, "an' let's git out o' here."

"What's all the hurry?" queried Loudon.

"That female girl in the hotel. She'll be out in a minute, an' then ye'll have to introduce me."

"She's Kate Saltoun, Scotty."

"Old Salt's daughter! It don't sound possible. An' him with a face like a grizzly. She's surely four aces, Tom, an' as pretty as a little red wagon. But I ain't aimin' to make her acquaintance, an' ye can gamble on that."

Happily for Scotty's peace of mind he and Loudon left Rocket twenty minutes ahead of the stage.

The drummer watched the departure of the stage with brooding eyes. When the dust in the street had settled he had another drink at the bar and ensconced himself in a corner of the barroom where he could glower unobserved at the landlord.

The latter had gone to the corral, but the drummer was still sitting in his chair, when, toward noon, two men entered. They were unprepossessing individuals, both of them, though one, the tall man with the black beard, had obviously just washed himself thoroughly. Even his clothing had been scrubbed.

The drummer sniffed inquiringly. What was that elusive odor—that strange smell or rather mixture of smells? The drummer sniffed again.

"Got a cold?" growled the black-bearded man.

"No," said the drummer sulkily.

"Then don't snuffle. I don't like snufflin', I don't. It makes me jumpy, snufflin' does. Breathe through yore mouth if ye got to."

The look which the black-avised individual bent upon the drummer was not reassuring. The wretched drummer shrank into himself and took care to breathe in an inoffensive manner. The black-bearded man was extremely sensitive about that odor, for it emanated from his own person and habiliments. Tobacco smoke had no effect upon it. It clung after the fashion of loving relations. Strong soap, scorched molasses, and singed feathers, had given birth to that odor. No wonder he was sensitive!

His companion, whose face bore numerous scratches, stared round the barroom.

"Where's the barkeep?" he grunted.

"Don't need no barkeep," announced the black-bearded man, and started to walk round the bar.

"Don't ye?" inquired the voice of the landlord. "Ye got another guess comin'. Ye can't run no blazers in this shack, Block, an' that goes."

The eyes of the black-bearded man glowed evilly. He stopped in his tracks, his raised hand halted in the act of reaching for a bottle. He stared at the landlord standing in the doorway. The landlord stared back, his thumbs hooked in his belt.

"Get us a drink then," snarled Block, and he joined his friend in front of the bar.

"That's what I'm here for," rejoined the landlord cheerfully. "I don't care who I serve. Why, I give *that* a drink a while ago." He flicked a contemptuous thumb at the drummer.

"Hurry up!" admonished Block.

"No hurry," chirruped the landlord insultingly. "I never was in a hurry, an' I ain't goin' to begin now. What'll ye have —milk?"

"Say," exclaimed the man with the scratched face, "are you lookin' for trouble?"

"Stranger," replied the landlord, turning a pair of calm brown eyes on his questioner —"stranger, a gent don't never look for trouble. It comes to him unexpected-like. But none ain't comin' to me today. Soon as I seen you two tin-horns in here I told a friend o' mine. He's a-watchin' ye from the window right now."

Block and his friend involuntarily turned their heads. Framed in the open window were the head and shoulders of a man. In his hands was a sawed-off shotgun. The blunt muzzle gaped ominously at them.

"Well, by——!" began the scratch-faced man.

"Shut up!" said Block. "These folks seem scared of us. No use fussin'. We'll just licker an' git."

"Them's the words I like to hear," observed the landlord, slapping bottle and glasses on the bar. "Ye can't pull out too quick to suit me, Block. I know about yore goin's-on down in Farewell—rubbin' out harmless strangers. Ye may be a sheriff an' all that, but yore office don't travel a foot in Sunset County."

"Ye talk big," growled Block. "Ye needn't think ye can bluff me. If I feel like takin' this town apart, I'll do it."

"Sure, just like ye took the Bend apart. Got the molasses out o' yore system yet?"

Block's eyes were fairly murderous. The landlord grinned.

"That shotgun's double-barreled," he observed. "Buckshot in each barrel."

Block gulped his whisky. The scratch-faced man had finished his drink and was placidly rolling a cigarette.

"Never did like to quarrel," he remarked, "special not with a shotgun. Mister—" to the landlord—"have any gents from the Bend rode in today—or yesterday?"

"Lookin' for friends?" queried the landlord.

"Sure!"

"I thought so. Well, I can't tell ye. Ye see, I ain't right well acquainted hereabouts. I dunno everybody. There might somebody 'a' come through, an' then again there mightn't. I seed a Injun yest'day, though. Looked like a Digger. Might he be yore partic'lar friend?" An exquisite solicitude was in the landlord's tone.

The other refused to take offense. He smiled wryly. When he spoke, his words were without rancor.

"I can't claim the Injun. I was thinkin' of a sport named Loudon. Know him?"

"I told ye I didn't know many people round here."

"I was just a-wonderin'. I was kind o' anxious to see Loudon."

"Well, I dunno nothin' about him."

"There was a man here named Loudon," piped up the drummer, perceiving an opportunity of annoying the landlord. "He stayed here all night. Another man was with him, a very dirty old character named Mackenzie. I think Scotty was his first name."

"Which way did they go?" demanded Block.

"They rode away toward Paradise Bend."

"That drummer can lie faster'n a hoss can trot," drawled the landlord.

"You know they stayed here all night," said the drummer with a flash of spirit. "I had breakfast with them."

The landlord walked swiftly to the drummer, who quailed.

"Yo're lyin'!" announced the landlord. "Say so. Say yo're lyin', ye pup, or I'll pull yore neck in half."

"I'm lyin'!" cried the drummer hastily. "I'm lyin'."

"There wasn't nobody here but you, was there?" inquired the landlord.

"N-no."

"I guess that's enough. You see how reliable this sport is, gents. Can't believe a word he says."

Block turned toward the door. The scratch-faced man winked at his own reflection in the mirror behind the bar and stuck his tongue in his cheek.

"C'm'on," said Block.

The sheriff and his friend went out into the street. The landlord followed, his expression one of pleasurable anticipation. Four citizens of Rocket, grouped on the sidewalk, watched the two men glumly as they swung into their saddles and loped away. The landlord's face fell.

"Say," he demanded, "why didn't ye arrest him?"

"Couldn't be did," replied the largest of the quartette, who wore a marshal's star on his vest. "Loudon said his hoss was a chestnut, white spot on nose, didn't he? One o' them two cayuses was a black, but the other was a bald-face Pinto. Nothin' like a chestnut."

"But Loudon done said the hoss-thief was ridin' with Sheriff Block."

"That's all true enough, an' the party a-ridin' off with Block may be a hoss-thief, but if he is, he ain't ridin' Loudon's hoss. An' Loudon's hoss is the only one we know about. Got to go by the hoss, Dave."

"Why, looky here, Sim; Loudon described

the feller right plain. That's Rufe Cutting a-ridin' away there with Block, or I'm a Dutchman."

"He may be," returned the marshal equably, "an' if Loudon was here an' could identify him I'd grab him too, quick. But unless he's ridin' a chestnut hoss with a white spot on his nose I can't arrest him without a warrant. An' there ain't no warrant. See how it is, Dave?"

"Oh, I see all right," mourned the landlord, "an' it makes me sick. —— it! Soon as I seen 'em come in my place I says to myself, 'Here's that hoss-thief.' All I thought of was that Loudon said the sport was with Block. It makes me sick. It sure does. After me a-cookin' it all up with you to arrest him! C'm'on in an' have somethin', an' watch me give that drummer the prettiest lickin' he ever had in his life."

CHAPTER XII

SCOTTY ADVISES

WHEN Loudon and Scotty reached Paradise Bend they separated, Scotty going to the Burrs', while Loudon strolled leisurely about the streets. Loudon visited all the saloons and drew into conversation the bartenders and other prominent citizens. In less than an hour he met Scotty behind the Burr corral.

"Five days ago an' early in the mornin'," said Loudon, "a Seven Lazy Seven boy met O'Leary ridin' the trail to the Flying M. O'Leary told him, an' it wasn't none necessary, that he was goin' to Sucker Creek. That's away north a good eighty mile.

"Well, that same day in the evenin' a freighter, camped on the trail half-way between the Bend and Rocket, seen O'Leary a-peltin' south. The freighter only got a flash at him by the light of his fire, but he knowed him all right, an' he hollered a howdy. O'Leary never notices. Just leans over his horn an' keeps a-foggin' right along. There ye have it—the Flying M trail in the mornin', an' twenty-five mile south o' the Bend in the evenin'. Now who mailed that letter?"

"It looks like O'Leary," admitted Scotty. "But what ye goin' to do about it? Ye can't do nothin', Tom. I tell ye, ye got to wait. Now don't ye go projeckin' round O'Leary an' kick up any fuss. It won't do no good, an' ye might reap some lead. Yo're needed at the ranch, Tom. Just you keep that in mind."

"Don't fret. I ain't goin' to say nothin' to O'Leary—yet. I'll give him plenty o' rope to hang himself with. But I wish you'd let me Injun round some, Scotty. Gimme two weeks, now. Ye won't regret it."

"Now, Tom, there ye go again. I need ye to home, I tell ye."

"Oh, all right; have it yore own way. But if ye won't gimme the two weeks now, I'll take 'em later on my own account. I aim to get my hoss back."

"We'll talk about that later," said Scotty. "You go on in an' see Dorothy. Y'ought to be ashamed o' yourself—stickin' out here when there's a pretty little girl like that in the house."

"Thought ye didn't like ladies any."

"Depends on the lady. There's brands an' brands, Tom. But that little girl o' the Cap'n's—well, say, she always makes a gent feel right to home. Wish I was younger. Yes, sir; I sure wish I didn't have so many rings on my horns. I'd have you boys runnin' in circles, I would. Go on in now, Tom, an' if ye work it right Mis' Burr'll ask ye to grub."

Loudon went.

"Just in time for supper," was Mrs. Burr's greeting. "Dorothy's out front. Pete O'Leary's here again. He's stayin' to supper, too. Thank Heaven, I'll have a crowd for once. I sure enjoy seein' folks eat. Say, Tom," she added lowering her voice, "is O'Leary a friend o' yours?"

"I know his name, Mis' Burr," said Loudon, "an' that's about all."

"Well, I was just wonderin'. I dunno whether to like that fellah or not. He strikes me as bein' conceited a lot. He always acts to me like he thought every girl he knowed was in love with him. He's good-lookin' an' all that, but I don't cotton to his eyes. They look as if they was holdin' somethin' back all the time. See what I mean? Like he was sayin' one thing an' thinkin' another."

"I see," Loudon nodded. He understood perfectly.

"He ain't never hung round Dorothy till lately. But ye can't say nothin', I s'pose. Still—oh, well, no use chatterin' about it."

Loudon wondered whether Scotty had known O'Leary was in the house when he urged Loudon to go in and see Dorothy. The presence of O'Leary did not forecast an enjoyable meal.

"I just come in for a drink, Mis' Burr," said Loudon. "I wish I could stay for supper. Thank ye kindly, all the same, but I got to see a man down street."

"Huh," grunted Mrs. Burr skeptically. "Ye don't like O'Leary neither, do ye?"

"I didn't say nothin' about that, ma'am."

"No, o' course not. Ye can't fool me, Tom Loudon. There's cool water in that covered pail. Say, it's too bad about that hoss o' yores. Scotty told me ye didn't have no luck in Rocket. It sure is too bad. He was a right good hoss."

"He is a good hoss, ma'am. He ain't a goner yet, by a jugful. I'll get him back."

"I hope so, an' I hope ye lynch the thief, or shoot him anyway. He hadn't ought to live a minute. The Flyin' M cook too. Ye can't hardly believe it."

Loudon got his drink and departed. As he rode past the house he saw Dorothy and O'Leary sitting on the doorstep. Dorothy waved her hand and smiled. O'Leary positively beamed. Had Loudon been his oldest friend O'Leary's greeting could not have been more cordial.

"Now I'd like to know," thought Loudon, as he rode down the street, "what license he's got to be so cheerful. Is it 'cause I ain't stayin' to supper, or is it 'cause he's got some other card up his sleeve?"

"Why didn't you stay to supper?" chuckled Scotty, when Loudon dropped into the chair next him at the hotel dining-table.

"I couldn't stand it to be away from you so long," retorted Loudon, and helped himself generously to the butter.

"I kind o' thought it might be that way. Try them pickles. They taste like they'd been used for tannin' saddles."

Night had not yet fallen when Loudon and Scotty started for the Flying M. As they passed the house of Big Jim Mace, Scotty groaned.

"Here comes that female girl o' Old Salt's," he whispered perturbedly. "She's headin' our way. She's a-callin' to ye, Tom! She's a-callin' to ye! I'm goin' on. I'll wait for ye on the trail."

There was no disregarding Kate Saltoun. She had even stepped out into the street in her efforts to attract Loudon's attention. Scotty loped onward, and Loudon twisted his horse toward the sidewalk.

"Well," said Kate, smiling up at him, "you are a nice one! I believe you'd have passed right by without speaking if I hadn't called to you. Come on in and see Mrs. Mace and me. Jim's down street, and we want some one to talk to."

"Just some one?"

Loudon could have bitten his tongue off for uttering this flirty remark. But for the life of him he could not help saying it.

Kate smiled.

"Some one would probably do for Lil," she said, "but I want you. I've an awful lot to tell you, Tom."

"I can't, Kate. Honest, I'd like to come in an' see ye a lot. I sure would. But I got to ride out to the ranch with Scotty Mackenzie."

"Is that funny old person with the particolored sleeve Scotty Mackenzie? I've heard dad speak of him. They never liked each other, I believe. Bring him over, I'd like to meet him. Then he can talk to Lil."

"That'd be fine, but ye see Scotty's in a hurry to get back to the ranch. I'm afraid we couldn't manage it nohow."

Kate's face fell. Loudon glanced up and saw Dorothy Burr and Pete O'Leary approaching. Interest, polite in Dorothy's case, speculative in O'Leary's, was manifest in their expressions. Kate moved closer to Loudon and laid a hand on the neck of his horse.

"Tom," she whispered, "I just heard what Block tried to do. Lil told me. You don't believe I had anything to do with it, do you?"

"Why, no, o' course I don't."

"Are you sure?"

"Why, Kate, I know you couldn't do a thing like that. Don't ye think any more about it."

"I believe you do, just the same. Tom, no matter how much I disliked a person I wouldn't betray him."

"I believe ye. Honest, I do."

Dorothy and O'Leary passing at this juncture, Loudon lifted his hat. Kate turned and looked after the pair. When her eyes once more met Loudon's there was a faint trouble in their black depths.

"Who are they?" she queried.

"Cap'n Burr's daughter an' Pete O'Leary."

"Oh." There was deep meaning in that "oh."

"She lives up yonder a ways. Mis' Mace knows her, I guess."

"How nice! Perhaps I shall meet her. I should like to, really. Tell me, do you know her well?"

"Not very well. Ye see, I ain't in town such a lot. Say, Kate, did Mis' Mace write an' tell ye I was up here at the Bend?"

"Yes, I believe she did." Kate's tone was ingenuous. But the quick upward fling of her eyes was not. Far from it.

"Did ye tell your father an' the boys?"

"Why, I don't remember, Tom. I might have. Very possibly I did. Why?"

"I was just a-wonderin'."

"You mean—" gasped Kate, her eyes widening with genuine horror.

At first, misinterpreting the trend of his questioning, she had believed him brazenly fishing. Now she understood the significance underlying his words. She wanted to scream. But half the street was watching them. Underlip caught between her teeth, she sucked in her breath. Piteously her eyes searched Loudon's face.

"Tom!" she breathed. "Tom! You do think I betrayed you after all. Oh, Tom! Tom!"

It was Loudon's turn to be distressed.

"Yo're on the wrong trail, Kate," he soothed. "I know ye didn't tell Block or the 88 outfit. But if the Bar-S boys knowed I was up here it could easy get around. Richie o' the Cross-in-a-box an' Cap'n Burr knowed too. They might 'a' let it out. I'm sorry I asked ye if it makes ye feel that way."

"Oh, I see it now. I must have told. And it was my telling that sent Block up here. Tom, if he had taken you south and —and anything had happened, it—it would have killed me. Life just wouldn't have been worth living any longer."

Was ever mortal man in a similar predicament? Here was a beautiful woman baring her heart to him in broad daylight on a public thoroughfare. Cold prickles raced madly up and down Loudon's spine. What could he say? He had a wild impulse to whirl his horse and gallop after Scotty. Obviously this was the safer course to follow. Weakly he temporized.

"Kate, do ye know what yo're sayin'?"

"Of course. Why shouldn't I say it? I love you, don't you know that? There, it's out! I suppose I ought to be ashamed of myself, but I'm not. I'm glad."

Throughout the latter part of the conversation Kate had barely spoken above a whisper, but to Loudon it seemed that she fairly shouted. He was positive that all the town had heard. His dismayed eyes slid round. He half-expected to see Mrs. Mace and her neighbors craning their necks with their hands cupped round their ears. But Mrs. Mace was not visible, and the score of people in view were not displaying undue interest. Loudon breathed more easily.

"Ye—ye—" he stammered, his face beetred. "Ye hadn't ought to 'a' said that."

"Why not?" she demanded coolly. "It's true."

Her self-possession was extraordinary. She was not even blushing. This was a Kate that Loudon did not know. In the face of her bald assertion he could not tell her that matters had completely changed; that he loved her no longer. No, not that. He realized his disadvantage acutely, and squirmed. Kate looked expectant. He must say something, and quickly too, or she would propose to him on the spot.

"I—I got to be goin'!" he exclaimed desperately. "Scotty's waitin' for me. Gug-gug-good-by."

"Good-by, Tom," said Kate, with a radiant smile. "I'll see you some other time."

"Some other time!" groaned Loudon, as he galloped down the street. "Some other time! She will, too. An' what'll I do? What'll I do? I don't like her any more. I don't like her a little bit. This is sure one —— of a fix!"

"WHAT did she do to ye?" inquired Scotty, when Loudon joined him.

"Do to me! What do you mean?"

"Ye look like ye'd just missed being hugged to death by a b'ar. No offense, Tom, but ye sure do look a heap shivery."

"It's them pickles I had for supper, Scotty. I knowed they'd make me sick."

"They was rich, for a fact."

They loped in silence for a half-hour.

"Scotty," said Loudon suddenly, "if anybody comes out to the ranch a-lookin' for me, tell 'em I've pulled my freight ye dunno where."

"Anybody?" Scotty quirked an eyebrow.

"Anybody—man, woman, or child."

"Well, say, look here, Tom!" exclaimed Scotty in alarm. "Ye don't mean to say that Miss Saltoun girl is a-comin' out to the Flyin' M!"

"I dunno. I hope not."

"Which I sure hope not too. She's so good-lookin' she scares me, she does. I don't want to go nowheres near her, an' I won't neither. No, sirree. If she ever comes a-traipsin' out to the ranch ye can do yore own talkin'."

"Aw, keep yore shirt on. I guess now she won't come."

"I'll bet she's a-aimin' to, or ye wouldn't 'a' said what ye did. Ye can't fool me, Tom. She'll come, an' she'll bring Jim Mace's wife along for a chaperon, an' they'll most likely stay for two meals, an' I'll have to grub in the corral. Great note this is! Druv out o' my own home by a couple o' female women!"

"Laugh! It's awful funny! I never could abide Mis' Mace neither. She's always talkin', talkin'. Talk the hide off a cow, an' not half try. How Jim stands her I can't see nohow. If she was my woman I'd feed her wolf-pizen, or take it myself."

"I guess now ye never was married, was ye, Scotty?"

"Me married! Well, I guess not! Come mighty close to it once. I must 'a' been crazy or drunk, or somethin' — anyway, when I was a young feller over east in Macpherson, Kansas, me an' Sue Shimmers had it all fixed for hitchin' up together. Nice girl, Sue was. Good cook, a heap energetic, an' right pretty in the face. The day before the weddin' Sue cuts stick an' elopes with Tug Wilson, the blacksmith.

"I felt bad for mighty nigh a week, but I've been a heap joyous ever since. Yes, sir, Sue developed a lot after marriage. Why, if Tug took so much as one finger o' old Jordan Sue'd wallop him with a ax-handle. Poor old Tug used to chew up so many cloves he got dyspepsy. Between the ax-handle an' the dyspepsy Tug had all he could swing to keep alive. I've never stopped bein' grateful to Tug Wilson. He sure saved my life. Yes, sir; as a rule, females is bad medicine."

"How about Mis' Burr an' her daughter?"

"I said, as a general rule. Like I told ye once before, Mis' Burr an' Dorothy are real ladies, all-silk an' several yards wide. A gent can talk to them just like folks. An' Dorothy can have my ranch an' every cayuse on it, includin' my mules, any time she wants. Nothin's too good for that little girl."

"She's sure a winner."

"She's all o' that. Now there's a girl that'll make a ace-high wife. She wouldn't use no ax-handle. She'd understand a gent's failin's, she would, an' she'd break him of 'em so nice an' easy he wouldn't know nothin' about it. Yes, sir; the party that gets Dorothy Burr needn't worry none 'bout bein' happy."

"I guess now there ain't no party real sure-enough fit to make her a husband."

"There ain't. No, sir, ye can bet there ain't. But she'll marry some no-account tinhorn—them kind always does. Say, why don't you make up to her?"

"Well, I would," said Loudon gravely, "only ye see it wouldn't be proper. I ain't a no-account tinhorn."

"You ain't, but O'Leary is."

"It ain't gone as far as that!"

"Ye never can tell how far anythin's gone with a woman. Ye never can tell nothin' about her till it happens. She's a heap unexpected, a female is. Now I don't say as Dorothy'd marry ye, Tom. Ye may not be her kind o' feller at all. But yo're a darn sight better'n Pete O'Leary."

"Thanks," said Loudon dryly.

"Then again," rushed on Scotty, deeply engrossed in his subject, "it ain't noways necessary for ye to marry her. All ye got to do is give O'Leary the run. Chase him off—see? I've been thinkin' some serious o' doin' it myself, but I'd have to beef him, an' that wouldn't suit Dorothy. A lady don't like it none to have her admirers shot up. It only makes her more set to have 'em. But you, Tom, could go about it in a nice, refined way, an' get Dorothy to likin' ye better'n she does O'Leary, an' there ye are. No blood's spilt, an' the lady is saved."

"But s'pose she didn't cotton to me for a cent?"

"Ye got to risk that, o' course. But you can win out over O'Leary, I'll gamble on that."

"But why am I elected? Why me at all?"

"Well, say, ye'd ought to be ashamed o' yourself, raisin' objections thisaway. Here I am, tryin' to help out as nice a little girl as ever breathed, an' ye got to kick. —— selfish, I call it. Can't ye see I'm tryin' to do you a good turn, too? There's gratitude for ye! Well, it's like I always said: Old folks is never appreciated, no matter what they do. Yes, sir, I might 'a' saved my breath. Dorothy, she talked just like you do, only worse."

"What — why, you ain't been talkin' about this to Dor—Miss Burr, have ye?" demanded Loudon in horror.

"Why, sure, I did," said Scotty placidly. "I feel like a father to her, so why not? I didn't say much. I just told her O'Leary was a pup an' a sheepman an' not fit for her to wipe her feet on, an' why didn't she take a shine to some other gent for a change? She says, 'Who, for instance?' An' I says, 'Tom Loudon,' an' that's as far as I got. She goes up in the air like a pony, instanter."

"Which I should say she might. You had yore nerve, ringin' me into it! Ain't ye got no sense at all?"

"Lots. Yo're the witless one. If ye had any brains ye'd take my advice."

"I can't now, even if I wanted to."

"Sure ye can. She spoke to ye all right this aft'noon, didn't she?"

"Yes, but——"

"Well, I'd given her my opinion o' things just about twenty minutes before ye met me at the corral. So, ye see, she wasn't mad at you. She wasn't really mad at me. I seen the twinkle in her eye all the time she was givin' me fits. Why, look here, Tom, when she says, 'Who, for instance?' I couldn't think o' nobody but you. It was impulse, it was, an' impulses are always right. Wouldn't be impulses if they wasn't.

"So there y'are. Ye don't have to marry each other, if ye don't want to. Sure not. But ye'd ought to give each other a whirl anyway. Ye might hit it off amazin'. I'm bettin' ye will, I don't care what either o' ye say."

Loudon, divided between anger and horrified amazement, was speechless. Scotty Mackenzie was more than astounding. He was hopelessly impossible.

"Well," remarked Loudon, when he was able to speak, "ye sure are three kings an' an ace when it comes to other people's business. Some day, Scotty, ye'll go bulgin' into the affairs o' some party who don't understand yore funny little ways, an' he'll hang yore hide on the fence."

"I s'pose likely," said Scotty glumly. "It sure is a ungrateful world. But," he added, brightening, "ye'll do what I say, won't ye, Tom? I tell ye I know best. I've sort o' cottoned to ye ever since I found out who ye was an' all, an' I always did like Dorothy Burr. Here's you, an' there she is. Why, it's Providence, Tom, Providence; an' nobody has a right to fly in the face o' Providence. Ye won't never have no luck if ye do. I ask ye like a friend, Tom—an' I hadn't ought to have to ask ye, not with such a good-looker as Dorothy—I ask ye like a friend to go see this little girl, an'——"

"An' prove yo're right," interrupted Loudon.

"Well, yes. Though I know I'm right, an' I tell ye plain if you two don't hook up for keeps ye'll be sorry. Yes, sir, ye will. Now don't say nothin', Tom. Just think it over, an' if ye want any help come to me."

"Ye make me sick. Ye sure do."

"Think it over. Think it over."

"Think nothin' over! I ain't in love with Miss Burr, an' I ain't a-goin' to be. Ye can gamble on that, old-timer. As a woman-wrangler I'm a good hoss an' cowman, an' hereafter from now on I'm a-stickin' to what I know best."

Loudon relapsed into sulky silence. Yet for the life of him he could not be wholly angry with Scotty Mackenzie. No one could. Scotty was Scotty, and, where another man would have been shot, Scotty went scatheless.

"SLICK!" said Scotty, ten minutes after arriving at the Flying M—"Slick, I guess yes. The feller that wrote that letter knowed my writin' better'n I do myself. Don't blame ye a mite, Doubleday, for bein' fooled. Don't blame ye a mite.

"I'll fix this trick for good and all. Hereafter I don't write no more letters to ye, see? Then if our forgin' brother takes his pen in hand agin it won't do him no good. What? No, I'm too sleepy. You go down an' ask Loudon. He was the center o' curiosity, an' he knows more about that riot at the Bend than I do."

When Doubleday had gone Scotty Mackenzie did not act like a person overcome by sleep. He lit a cigarette, slid down in his chair and put his feet on the desk.

"Yo're a great man, Scotty," he chuckled. "Yes, sir, I dunno as I ever seen yore like. I didn't know ye was such a deeplomat. No, sir, I sure didn't."

But Mr. Mackenzie did not realize that

Loudon in his statements regarding possible affection for Miss Dorothy Burr meant exactly what he said.

On the corral fence Loudon sat with Telescope Laguerre and related his adventures. The half-breed harkened sympathetically. Occasionally he removed the cigarette from his lips in order to swear.

"And," said Loudon in conclusion, "I'm goin' south after the little hoss in two or three weeks."

"Queet?"

"Yep."

"I queet too. I go wit' you."

"What for? No need o' you losin' yore job too."

"—— de job! I been here long tam—two, t'ree year. I wan' for move along un see w'at happen een de worl'. Een you' beesness, two gun ees better dan only wan. Are you me?"

"Oh, I'm you all right enough. I'll be glad to have ye with me, Telescope, but——"

"Den dat ees settle'," interrupted Telescope, his eyes glittering in the glow of his cigarette. "W'en you go, I go, un togedder we weel geet de leetle hoss. Ah, my frien', eet ees de luck I have you to go wit'. I been knowin' for week now I mus' go soon."

"Gettin' restless?"

Telescope nodded, his eyes fixed on the far-away line of saw-toothed mountains black against the stars. When he spoke, his voice had altered.

"Tom, de ole tam have come back to me, un w'en de ole tam do dat I can not stay. I mus'—My frien', have you evair love a woman?"

"Once I did."

"Den you weel un'erstan'. Wan tam, fifteen year ago, I have woman. I have odder woman now un den—five, six mabbe, but dey was Enjun un breed. Dees woman she was not Enjun. She was Française, un we was marry un leeve over on de Sweetwatair Rivière near de Medicine Mountain.

"Well, we was happy, she un me, un I was hunt de buffalo for Ole Man Rantoul. Rantoul she have de post dere on de Sweetwatair. Dere was odder men keel de buffalo for Rantoul, un wan of dese men she see my wife Marie w'en she go wit' me to de post. Dees man she yong man name' Taylor—Pony George dey call heem,'cause she was all tam bust de pony.

"Well, wan tam I go 'way two—t'ree week, mabbe. I come home een de afternoon. No leetle dog she play 'roun' de log-house. No smoke from de chimney. No Marie she stan' at de door.

"I go queeck to de house. Leetle dog lie dead in front de door. Door shut. I go een. I fin' Marie—I fin' Marie!" A wild, fierce note crept into the low monotone. "I fin' my Marie on de floor. She varree weak, but she can talk leetle. She tell me w'at happen. Two day before I geet back Pony George come to de log-house. Pony George she try for to mak' de love to my wife. Marie she go for rifle. Pony George geet de rifle firs'. Dog try for bite heem. Pony George keeck de dog out un shoot heem.

"My wife she grab de knife. She fight. But Pony George strong man. Get cut leetle, but not bad. He—he—well, I can do nothin' for my wife. Nex' day she die.

"I ride to de post o' Ole Man Rantoul. Pony George not dere. Rantoul say Pony George go 'way t'ree day before—not come back. I go after Pony George. I not fin' heem. I go sout' to de Nation. I go to Dakota. I go all de way from Canaday to de Rio Grande. Five year I heet de trail, but I never fin' Pony George.

"Now I work on de ranch, but always I can not stay. W'en de ole tam come back I mus' go. Well, my frien', some day I fin' Pony George, un w'en dat day come I weel hang hees hair on my bridle. Ah, I weel keel dat man—keel heem slow, so she weel have plenty tam for see hees deat' before she die."

Abruptly Telescope Laguerre slipped down to the ground and vanished in the darkness.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DANCE

A WEEK later, while the outfit was eating supper, Swing Tunstall burst yelling into the bunk-house. He flung his hat on the floor and thudded into his seat.

"Dance!" he whooped, hammering on the table with his knife and fork. "Dance! Big dance! Down at the Bend. Next week. Saturday night. They're a-goin' to have it in the hotel. Hooray!"

"Pass him the beans, quick!" shouted Doubleday. "Get him to eatin' before the roof pulls loose. When d'je say it was, Swing?"

"Saturday night, next week. Butter, butter, who's got the grease? An' the canned cow. That's the stuffy. Say, that's a-goin' to be a reg'lar elephant of a dance, that is. They's a new girl in town—I seen her. She's stayin' at Mis' Mace's, an' she's as pretty as a royal flush. Miss Kate Saltoun her name is, an' she's from the Bar-S down on the Lazy River."

"We'll all go," announced Doubleday.

"You bet we will," said Giant Morton. "Swing, where's that necktie o' mine ye borried last week?—yes, the red one. You know the one I mean. You wanted it so's ye could make a hit with that hash-slinger at the hotel. Can't fool me, ye old tarrapin. Where is it?"

"I'll git it for ye later," gurgled Tunstall, his mouth full. "I don't guess I lost it. Ca'm yoreself, Giant, ca'm yoreself. What's a necktie?"

"Don't guess ye've lost it! Well I like that! I paid a dollar six bits for that necktie down at the Chicago Store. There ain't another like it in the territory. Ragsdale said so himself. You gimme that necktie or I'll pizen yore bronc."

"GOIN' to de Bend tomorrow?" inquired Telescope of Loudon, when they were riding the range the day before the dance.

"I don't guess so. I don't feel just like dancin'. Don't enjoy it like I used to. Gettin' old, I guess."

"I'm goin', but not to de dance een de hotel. I'm goin' to de dance-hall, un I weel play de pokair too. Ah, I weel have de good tam. W'y not you come wit' me?"

"Maybe I will. See how I feel tomorrow. I'm goin' to pull my freight next week sometime. Got an engagement in Farewell in five weeks or so, an' I want to find the little hoss before then."

"We'll fin' heem, you un me. I am ready any tam you say."

That evening Scotty Mackenzie halted Loudon on his way to the bunk-house.

"Goin' to the dance, Tom?" queried Scotty.

"I'm goin' to the Bend, but no dance in mine."

"Say, you make me sick! Dorothy'll be at that dance, an' ye'll hurt her feelin's if ye don't go. She'll think ye don't want to dance with her or somethin'."

"I can't help what she thinks, can I? I don't have to go to that dance."

"Ye don't have to, o' course not, but ye got to think o' other folks. Why, only day before yesterday when I was at the Bend she was askin' after ye, an' I told her ye'd sure see her at the dance."

"Ye did, did ye? All right, I'm goin' to the Bend tomorrow with the rest o' the boys, but I've got a little poker game in mind. The dance is barred, Scotty."

"Oh, all right. Have it yore own way. I'm only tryin' to help ye out. Say, Tom, y'ain't still thinkin' o' goin' away, are ye? Ye can have that bay like I said, an' another pony, too, if ye like. Ye see, I want ye to stay here at the Flyin' M. I'm hard up for men now, an'——"

"Say," interrupted Loudon, on whom a great light had suddenly dawned, "say, is that why yo're so anxious to have me go see Miss Burr, huh? So I'll fall in love with her, an' stay here, huh? Is that it?"

"Why, Tom, o' course not," denied Scotty indignantly. "I wasn't thinkin' o' such a thing."

"I ain't none so sure, Scotty. It sounds just like ye."

"Well, it ain't like me nohow. Yo're wrong, Tom, all wrong as usual. Suit yoreself about the dance, suit yoreself. I got nothin' more to say. Here's a letter come for ye today."

Scotty handed the letter to Loudon and departed, offended dignity in the set of his shoulders. The pose was assumed, and Loudon knew it. When next they met, Scotty would reopen his favorite issue as usual.

"Now how did he guess it?" wondered Scotty, gloomily kicking the pebbles on his way to the office. "How did he guess the truth, I'd like to know? An' he's goin' away after all! The best man in the outfit! I got to do somethin', that's a cinch."

Poor Scotty! So must Machiavelli have felt when one of his dearest schemes was upset by some clever Florentine.

Left alone, Loudon tore open the letter. It ran:

> Dere frend lowden Id uv rote sooner only Ive been sick fele —— bad stil sene things fur a weak but I can rite now anyhow. Wel, after you an Mackenzy lef in the afternoon Block an the uther fellar rid in. I noed the uther fellar what stole yore hoss cause he looked just like you sed hed look but the hoss he was ridin wasnt yore hoss he was sumbuddy elses hoss I dunno whoos yet. Wen I sene

Block an him I had it all fixed up with the marshul to arest the uther fellar but the hoss wasnt yourn it was a bawlface pinto so the marshal couldnt arest him without a warant. Block an him rode away on the trail to Farewel. Block tride to find out bout you an Scotty an that —— drummer told him how you an Scotty had rid back to the Bend. Wel, I knoked the drummer down an stepped on his face an throwed him into the waterin-troff an kiked him three times roun the house. Im lookin out for yore hoss wen I see him Ill let you noe hopin this fines you like it leeves me Ime feelin purty good now yore frien Dave Sinclair.

Dave Sinclair was the landlord of the hotel in Rocket. Loudon re-read the letter and swore whole-heartedly. To miss Rufe Cutting by a few hours! Riding a bald-faced pinto, was he? What had he done with Ranger? Loudon went to the bunk-house in a brown study.

Scotty alone of the Flying M outfit elected to remain at the ranch the night of the dance. All the others raced into town before sunset. At the ford of the Dogsoldier they met the Seven Lazy Seven boys from beyond the Government Hills. Doubleday greeted Dawson, the Seven Lazy Seven foreman, with a long wolf-howl. Whooping and yelling, the riders squattered across the creek and poured into Paradise Bend, the wild-eyed ponies rocketing like jack-rabbits.

IT WAS an expensive evening in the Bend. The corrals were full of ponies bearing on their hips the brands of the Two Bar, TVU, Double Diamond A, Wagonwheel, and half-a-dozen other ranches. In the hotel corral where the Flying M outfit unsaddled, Loudon saw horses belonging to the Barred O and the T up-and-down, which ranches were a score of miles southwest of Rocket.

The men of the various outfits circulated rapidly from saloon to saloon. By midnight many would be drunk. But there were several hours before midnight.

Loudon and Telescope left their comrades lining up at the hotel bar and gravitated to the Three Card. Here they found Jim Mace and Marshal Dan Smith, who hailed them both with marked cordiality. They drank together, and Jim Mace suggested a little game. Telescope's eyes began to gleam, and Loudon perceived that his friend was lost to him for that evening. Loudon was in no mood for poker, so the three prevailed upon a gentleman from the Barred O to make a fourth, and retired to an empty table in the corner of the room. Loudon remained standing at the bar, regarding the rows of bottles on the shelves and glumly pondering the exigencies of life.

"Cards no good," he reflected. "Dancin' the same. Nothin' goes good no more. Even licker don't taste like it used to. Guess I better have another an' make sure."

He had another. After a time he felt better, and decided to look in at the dance. From the open windows of the hotel issued sounds of revelry—the shuffle and pound of boot-leather and the inspiring strains of the "Arkansaw Traveler" played by two fiddlers sitting on a table.

Loudon, his hat pulled forward, leaned his chest against a window-sill and peered over the fat shoulders of Mrs. Ragsdale and a freighter's wife, who were enjoying the festivities with such zest that the chairs they sat in were on the point of collapse.

Kate Saltoun and Dorothy Burr were dancing in the same set. Dawson of the Seven Lazy Seven was Kate's partner, and Pete O'Leary swung Dorothy. Loudon was struck by the fact that Kate was not smiling. Her movements, likewise, lacked a certain springiness which was one of her salient characteristics.

"Somebody must 'a' stepped on her toe," decided Loudon. "Bet she don't dance with Dawson again."

She didn't. Doubleday, perspiring and painfully conscious of a hard shirt and a forest-fire necktie, was her next partner. Loudon wondered why he had not hitherto perceived the marked resemblance between Doubleday and a fat cow. He found himself speculating on Kate's reasons for breaking her engagement. As he looked at Kate, her extreme beauty, contrasted with that of the other girls in the room, was striking.

"Kate is certainly a heap good-looker."

Mrs. Ragsdale and the freighter's wife turned sharply and stared open-mouthed at Loudon. Not till then did that young man realize that he had voiced aloud his estimate of Kate Saltoun. He fled hurriedly, his skin prickling all over, and dived into the kindly darkness behind the corral.

"Now I have done it!" he mourned bitterly, squatting on the ground. "Those old tongue-wagglers heard me, an' they'll tell her. I seen it in their faces. What'll she think o' me? Luck! There ain't no such thing. If all the rocks was tobacco an' all the grass cigarette-papers, I'd be there without a match."

From the hotel drifted thinly the lilt of "Buffalo Girls." A bevy of convivial beings in the street were bawling "The Days of Forty-Nine." Across the discordant riot of sound cut the sudden clipping drum of a galloping pony.

"Injuns!" shouted a voice. "Injuns!"

Loudon sprang up and dashed 'round the corral. In the flare of light from the hotel doorway a dusty man sat a dustier horse. The man was hatless, his dark hair was matted with dirt and sweat, and his eyes were wild.

"Injuns!" cried the dusty man. "Injuns on Hatchet Creek! I want help!"

In thirty seconds there was a fair-sized group surrounding the horseman. In a minute and a half the group had become a crowd. Up bustled Marshal Dan Smith followed by Telescope Laguerre, Jim Mace, and the gentleman from the Barred O. Loudon, first on the scene, was jammed against the rider's stirrup.

"Gents," the dusty man was saying, "my three pardners is a-standin' off the warwhoops in a shack over by Johnson's Peak on Hatchet Creek. There's more'n a hundred o' them feather-dusters an' they'll have my pardners' hair if ye don't come a-runnin'."

"Johnson's Peak!" exclaimed Jim Mace. "That's fifty mile away!"

"All o' that," assented the dusty man wearily, without turning his head. "For God's sake, gents, do somethin', can't ye? An' gimme a fresh hoss."

Already three-quarters of his hearers were streaking homeward for their Winchesters and saddles. The men from the ranches were the last to move away. No need for them to hurry. The few who had brought rifles to the Bend had left them with their saddles at the various corrals.

INSIDE of half-an-hour the dusty man, mounted on one of the marshal's ponies, was heading a posse composed of every available man in Paradise Bend. Only the marshal and two men who were sick remained behind.

The posse, a column of black and bobbing shapes in the starlight, loped steadily. Many of the ponies had traveled twenty and thirty miles that day, and there were fifty more to pass under their hoofs. The average cow-horse is a hardy brute and can perform miracles of work when called upon. Secure in this knowledge, the riders fully intended to ride out their mounts to the last gasp.

Doubleday and Dawson rode stirrup to stirrup with the man from Hatchet Creek. Tailing these three were Loudon, Telescope Laguerre, the Barred O puncher, and Jim Mace.

"How'd ye get through, stranger?" queried Doubleday.

"I dunno," said the dusty man. "I jus' did. I had to. It was make or break. Them warwhoops chased me quite a spell."

"You was lucky," observed Dawson.

"Yo're whistlin' I was. We was all lucky when it comes to that. We was at the shack eatin' dinner when they jumped us. S'pose we'd been down the creek where our claims is at, huh?"

"Yo're hair would sure be decoratin' a Injun bridle," admitted Dawson. "But I didn't know there was gold on Hatchet Creek."

"We got four claims," said the dusty man shortly.

"Gettin' much?"

"We ain't millionaires yet."

"No, I guess not," whispered Jim Mace to Loudon. "I'll gamble that gravel don't assay a nickel a ton. Been all through them hills, I have. I know Hatchet like I do the Dogsoldier. There's no gold there."

"This prospector party says different," muttered Loudon.

"You'll see," sniffed Jim Mace. "Gold on the Hatchet! He's loco? You'll see."

"It's a good thing, stranger," Dawson was saying, "ye hit the Bend when we was havin' a dance. There ain't more'n fifty or sixty men a-livin' reg'lar in the place."

"Well," said the dusty man, "I did think o' headin' for Fort Yardley. But them feather-dusters was in between, so it was the Bend or nothin'. Oh, I knowed I was takin' chances, what with no ranches in between, an' the little hoss liable to go lame on me an' all. It's a long ride, gents. Say, seems like we're a-crawlin' an' a-crawlin' an' gittin' nowheres."

"We're a gittin' some'ers right lively," corrected Doubleday. "If yore pardners have plenty o' cartridges they'll be a-holdin' out all right when we git there. Don't ye fret none, stranger."

"I ain't—only—only—well, gents there was a roarin' passel o' them Injuns."

"Sure, sure, but we'll strike the Hatchet near Tepee Mountain 'round sun-up, an' from Tepee to Johnson's Peak ain't more'n twenty-mile—less, if anythin'."

In the keen light of dawn the pyramidal bulk of Tepee Mountain loomed not six miles ahead. When the sun rose the posse had skirted its base and was riding along the bank of Hatchet Creek.

And now the dusty man began to display signs of a great nervousness. He fidgeted in his saddle, examined and tried the lever action of his rifle, and gloomily repeated many times that he believed the posse would arrive too late. As they passed above a cut bank, the dusty man, riding near the edge, dropped his Winchester. The piece slipped over the edge and splashed into the water fifteen feet below. Swearing, the dusty man rode back to where the bank was lower and dismounted.

"Don't wait for me!" he shouted, wading up-stream. "I'll catch up."

The posse rode onward. Some of the horses were staggering with fatigue. All of them were jaded and dripping with sweat. Suddenly Telescope Laguerre rode from the line and vaulted out of his saddle. He landed on his hands and knees and remained in that position, his head thrust forward, his eyes blazing with excitement.

"What's eatin' Telescope?" demanded Doubleday.

"Tom! Tom! Come here! Queeck!" shouted the half-breed.

"Say!" snorted Doubleday. "What is this, anyway? Do you fellers know there's some Injuns up here a piece?"

But Loudon had joined Telescope and neither of the two gave the slightest heed to the outraged Doubleday.

"Look!" exclaimed Laguerre, as the tail of the column passed. "Look! Yore hoss she come out o' de wood here! See!"

"My hoss! You mean Ranger?" Loudon stared thunderstruck at the hoofmarks of two horses.

"Yore hoss, Ranger! Ah, once I see the hoss-track I know heem again! Las' tam you shoe de hoss you shoe heem all 'roun'. Dees ees hees track. No man was ride heem. She was de led hoss. Feller ride odder hoss. See! Dey come out de wood un go dees way."

Telescope waved a hand over the way they had come.

"How old are the tracks?" queried Loudon breathlessly.

"Mabbeso four day. No use follow dem. We lose 'em on de hard groun'."

"Telescope, I got an idea somethin's wrong. I dunno what, but these tracks comin' in here this-a-way, an' that fellah with the Injun story—I guess now they hitch somehow. I tell ye I dunno how"—as Telescope opened his mouth to speak—"an' I may be wrong, but I'm goin' back after that party from Hatchet Creek."

Loudon swung into his saddle and spurred his mount. The animal responded gamely, but a pitifully slow lope was the best speed it could shake out of its weary legs. Laguerre's pony was in worse case. The short halt had stiffened his knees slightly and he stumbled at every other step. The two men lolloped jerkily down-stream. Rounding a sharp bend, they came in sight of the cut bank where the dusty stranger had dropped his gun. Neither man nor horse was visible.

"By gar!" exclaimed Laguerre. "By gar!"

Just then his horse stumbled for the last time, fell on its knees and rolled over on its side. Laguerre flung himself clear and bounced to his feet. The pony struggled up, but Laguerre did not remount. He dragged his rifle from the scabbard and ran forward on foot to rejoin his comrade. Loudon was leaning over the saddlehorn examining the spot where the dusty man had left his horse.

"Ground's kind o' hard," said Loudon, "but it looks like he'd headed for that flat."

"He go dere all right!" exclaimed Laguerre excitedly. "Come on, Tom!"

Running awkwardly, for cow-country boots are not fashioned for rapid locomotion, Laguerre led the way toward a broad meadow fifty yards away. Once in the meadow the trail was easier to follow. The meadow was at least a quarter-mile wide, and woods bordered it on three sides.

The trail led straight across it, and on into the forest. The trees did not grow thickly, and Laguerre, his eyes on the ground, threaded his way in and out between the trunks at an ankle-straining trot. He had excellent wind, had Telescope Laguerre. Loudon was forced to employ spurs and quirt in order to keep up with him.

Four hundred yards deep in the forest they saw ahead an opening in the trees. A minute later they charged into a large meadow. In the middle of the meadow was an ancient shack, doorless, the roof fallen in, flanked by a corral which gave evidence of having been recently repaired.

"Somethin' movin' in that corral," said Loudon, and dragged out his gun.

Then, in half a watch-tick, a man on a chestnut horse flashed across the open space between the corral and the shack. Loudon and Laguerre swung to one side, but the man did not immediately reappear on the other side of the shack. A few steps farther and they saw him. He was riding directly away from them and was within fifty yards of the forest.

The fugitive was a long two hundred yards distant, but they recognized his back without any difficulty. He was the dusty man from Hatchet Creek, and his horse was Loudon's Ranger.

"Look out for the hoss!" cried Loudon, as Laguerre flung up his rifle.

The rifle cracked spitefully once and again. The rider, with a derisive yell, disappeared among the trees. Laguerre dropped his rifle-butt, and began to utter strange and awful oaths in a polyglot of French and English. Loudon sheathed his six-shooter, kicked his feet out of the stirrups and calmly rolled a cigarette.

"No use a-cussin', Telescope," he observed. "He's done gone."

Pht-bang! a rifle spat from the distant wood. Loudon's horse gave a convulsive sidewise leap, dropped with a groan and rolled half over, pinning Loudon to the ground. Laguerre, flat on his stomach, was firing at the thinning smoke-cloud under the trees. But there were no more shots from the forest.

"Say, Telescope," called Loudon, "when ye get plumb through would ye mind pullin' this cayuse off o' my legs?"

Still cursing, Laguerre levered up the body of the dead pony with the barrel of his rifle, and Loudon wriggled free. He endeavored to stand on his feet, but sat down abruptly.

"What's de matter?" inquired Laguerre. "Bullet hit you too?"

"No," replied Loudon, gingerly feeling his right ankle, "my foot feels funny."

"Mabbeso de leg broke," suggested Laguerre. "Mabbeso dat feller she try anudder shot. Better you be behin' de loghouse."

He picked up his rifle, helped Loudon to stand erect and passed an arm 'round his waist. So, hopping on one foot, Loudon reached the shelter of the shack wall. Laguerre eased him to the ground and skipped nimbly down past the corral.

"Mabbeso I geet dat feller," he called over his shoulder. "Be back soon."

Laguerre returned in five minutes.

"Dat feller she geet clean away," he said disconsolately. "Nevair touch heem. By Gar! Eef I not have run so hard, I shoot better. Geet heem sure den."

"Pull my boot off, will ye, Telescope?" requested Loudon, extending his leg.

Laguerre pulled. Loudon gritted his teeth. The pain was sharp, nauseating.

"It's no good," said Loudon thickly. "Got to cut the boot off."

Laguerre whipped out his knife and slit the leather from instep to top. Gently he removed the boot. Loudon peeled off the sock. The ankle was badly swollen.

"Wiggle de toe," commanded Laguerre.

Loudon wriggled his toes and was able to move his ankle slightly, not without a deal of pain however. He noted with thankfulness that the pain was continuous, and not stabbing as it is when a bone is involved.

"Bone's all right," he observed cheerfully. "Only a sprain, I guess."

"Dat ees good," said Laguerre. "I geet de odder hoss."

He strode to the dead horse and stripped off saddle and bridle.

"Say," said Loudon, "I can do that while yo're goin' for the hoss. We'll have to leave 'em here anyway."

"No, not dees treep, my frien'," Laguerre said, carrying saddle and bridle toward the corral. "Dat feller she leave Dan Smeet's hoss on de odder side de corral. Hoss she pretty tire', but she carry you all right."

On his hands and knees Loudon crawled to the corral and peered between the bars. The corral was a large one. Till recently the grass had grown thickly within it. But that grass had been nibbled to the roots, and the marks of shod hoofs were everywhere. From a spring near the shack a small stream ran through one corner of the corral.

"Slick," said Loudon. "Couldn't have been better, could it?"

"No eet could not," agreed Laguerre. "She feex up dees ole corral fine. Dat Ranger hoss she been here mabbeso four day. She have de grass. She have de watair. She all ready fresh w'en dat feller she come. Un how can we follow wit' de tire' pony? Oh, she have eet figure all out. For w'y? Can you tell me dat, Tom?"

"I dunno. It sure is too many for me."

He painfully made his way to the spring, drank, and then soaked his sprained ankle in the icy stream till Laguerre came to help him into the saddle.

On the bank of the Hatchet they found Laguerre's pony lying where it had fallen. The animal was not dead. It was sound asleep.

"Hear dat?" said Laguerre, late in the afternoon.

Loudon listened. From afar off came a buzzing murmur. It grew louder and louder.

"The boys are sure some het up," observed Loudon.

The posse straggled into view. The boys were "het up." They were all talking at once. Evidently they had been talking for some time, and they were full of their subject. At sight of Loudon and his bootless leg the clamor stilled.

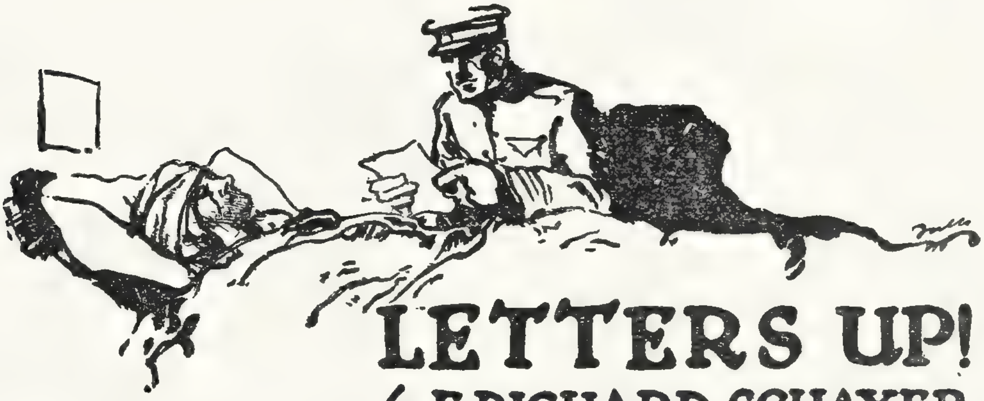
"Hit bad, Tom?" called Doubleday.

"Hoss fell on me," explained Loudon. "Ye don't have to say nothin', Doubleday," he added, as the foreman dismounted beside him. "I know just what happened."

"Oh, ye do, do ye?" snorted Doubleday wrathfully. "I might 'a' knowed there was somethin' up when that gent an' you fellers didn't catch up. An' us ridin' our heads off from hell to breakfast! Why, we'd be combin' this country yet only we met some o' the cavalry from Fort Yardley an' they said there ain't been an Injun off the reservation for a month. They sure give us the laugh. ——! That's his hoss! Did ye get him?"

"We did not. The fellah got away nice as ye please on my hoss Ranger—yep, the hoss Rufe Cutting stole in the Bend. Gimme the makin's, somebody, an' I'll tell ye what happened."

TO BE CONTINUED



LETTERS UP!

by E·RICHARD SCHAYER

"LET—TERS up!"

The flaps of the postman-corporal's tent were thrown back. He squatted over his mail-bags under the wavering light of three candles stuck on a packing-box. Through the dark came the splash of heavy boots in the mud. A crescent of men in water-soaked khaki huddled outside the door in the pitiless rain.

"Strapper 'Arris, 4478!" called the corporal.

"'Ere y'are." A big carter from Chiswick stuck a dripping, mud-streaked paw into the candle-light and clutched his packet. "Baccy from the Misses," he chuckled, withdrawing into the gloom.

"Roughrider Derrod, 3676."

"Right'o!" A little figure almost lost in the smallest service overcoat issued, wriggled forward for his letter.

"From lovin' Ma to 'er Byeby Boy," jeered a raucous voice from the darkness.

The little figure whirled a savage face in the direction of a humorist and snarled a torrent of obscene epithets. The humorist maintained a discreet silence.

"Dawson, 3768."

"Killed up-country, runnin' supplies to the trenches," volunteered another voice.

"Oh, yes," said the corporal, tossing the envelope to an assistant. "Mark it killed in line o' duty, an' send it back."

Slowly the postman waded through the stack of letters and parcels.

"That's all," he called at the end.

Those remaining splashed away to their soggy tents. One figure lingered as the postman set about closing the tent flaps.

"Sure there's nothin' fer me, cor'pral."

The voice was hoarse and lugubrious.

"Look'y 'ere, mate," growled the corporal "I didn't call yer bloomin' name, did I? I've been on this 'ere detail two months, an' every dye it's bloomin' well the same with yer. To my knowledge you ain't 'ad a letter since you got 'ere, an' every night you arsks me the same question. I'm gettin' sick o' arnswerin' yer. Now once fer all I tells yer if a letter ever do come for yer I'll bring it over to yer tent if yer'll bloomin' well stop botherin' me. 'Ow's that?"

"All right, cor'pral—all right mate," deprecated the doleful voice. "I didn't go for to bother you. I jus' thought as 'ow, p'raps you'd sort o' overlooked me. Good night, cor'pral, good night mate."

Shambling footsteps scrunched away through the mud.

"Poor ole blighter," muttered the corporal, spreading his rubber sheet over his bed-space on the tent's mud floor.

"Fullick again," I questioned, drawing on a dry pair of army socks.

"Now 'oo'd be writin' a bloomin' ole tramp like 'im, I want ter know?" said the corporal, hanging his sopping tunic on a nail in the tent-pole and unlacing his soaked boots.

There didn't seem to be any answer. We had all marked old Fullick. Even in so bedraggled and weird an assortment of derelicts as comprised our Remount Battalion of the Army Service Corps, Fullick was a misfit. Only a nation in direst extremity would have enlisted him in any branch of her service.

Truly all had been grist that came to the recruiting mills of the A. S. C. Any man capable of a day's labor was signed on as a "strapper," army-talk for groom; any stable hand, ex-jockey or general adventurer who could stick a horse bareback, was enlisted as "roughrider." "Ally Sloper's Cavalry" we were dubbed derisively by the trim, trained men of the infantry and cavalry base camps across the field, Ally Sloper being a low-comedy character as dear to the hearts of the English masses as Happy Hooligan is to ours.

We were a burlesque lot. We didn't drill, we didn't fight. We merely labored hard and long with the horses and supply trains. Now and then we got in the way of shrapnel or machine guns while defenselessly carrying cheese into the trenches, like Dawson, 3768.

OLD Fullick was by far the most grotesque Ally Sloper in the depot. He was tall, stooped and middle-aged, with a face whose every feature and line cried aloud his besetting and besotting vice. The quartermaster stores had dished him out a tunic far too short and riding-breeches far too large. His bony wrists stuck out of the tattered sleeves; the tunic ended ridiculously above the baggy seat of the breeches, disclosing a neglected rent through which protruded a wisp of dingy army shirt. He wore his puttees in a twisted, lumpy fashion all his own, and, having lost his regulation cap, crowned his sartorial disarray by folding his army muffler into a sort of stocking-cap that flopped down over one ear.

At first Fullick had been paid his allowance of five francs a week with the rest of us. Like the majority of Ally Slopers, Fullick spent his weekly dollar on chemical rum in the village of St. Etienne, down through the woods. Like his fellows he got drunk, but unlike the others, whether because of his age or constitutional weakness, he got helplessly drunk. This meant trouble.

The first time they gave him "Five days' pay and five days' C. C. (Confined to Camp)." This light sentence liberated both his pay and person for a second occasion a week later.

Then he got "Fourteen days' pay and fourteen days' C. C." He endured that fortnight of enforced sobriety in dog-like patience. On his next five francs he achieved so perfect a state of inebriety as to mistake, in the fog, the sergeant-major's tent for his, and fall heavily upon that snoring personage's prostrate anatomy.

This episode dignified poor Fullick with all the pomp and privilege of a general court martial, which tribunal coldly dealt him "Twenty-eight days First Field Punishment." There was nothing humorous in that.

First Field Punishment in the British Army is as unfunny as most things British. It imposes a ten-hour working day unloading supply ships at the docks. The day is punctuated with two two-hour rest periods. It is these rest periods that hurt. During these four hours the culprit stands on tiptoe, lashed to a post, his arms pulled high above his head and tied there by the wrists. It isn't pretty nor does it seem civilized. But the British army has been doing it since the Middle Ages, and apparently intends to keep on doing it.

How Fullick's rum-soaked old carcass stood the gaff of four weeks "F. F. P." is just one of those physiological mysteries. We thought it would kill him, but it didn't quite.

He came back thinner, dirtier, more ragged than ever, with a deeper droop to his narrow shoulders and a hungrier look in his bleary eyes. They stopped his pay entirely. Only when some other Ally Sloper took pity on him could that emaciated body know the tang of the drug it craved.

I was thinking of old Fullick and his ways as I pulled my water-logged boots over those nice dry socks.

"Wot's up," asked the corporal, snuggling down in his damp blankets.

"Night guard," I grunted, getting into my clammy, dripping overcoat.

"'Ard luck, matey," condoled the corporal blowing out his candle as I splashed out into the darkness to respond to the sergeant-major's mighty bellow—

"Fall in—the guard!"

Up and down between two long lines of picketed horses I tramped my four hours guard. It rained steadily, mercilessly. It was always raining. Since October we had known no day without rain—the cold, biting rain of those northern latitudes.

The horses stood quietly in their dejection and physical misery. Now and then it was necessary to step into the lines and straighten a muddy horse-rug that had slipped from some beast's back. Here and there along the line a sick horse coughed, wheezingly.

"'Lo, matey!"

The low hail came from a lank, drooping figure edging toward me through the murk. It was Fullick, ostensibly guarding the lines next to mine. He had come for a pipeful of tobacco. His bare, swollen hands trembled as he stuffed the bowl. In the glow of the match his thin face looked painfully old and haggard.

A raw gust swept across the plateau out of the blackness and drove the rain through our shoddy uniforms as through tea-strainers. We pushed in between two great Yorkshire heavy-draft horses for shelter. One of the big beasts turned his head and coughed abysmally in our faces.

"Poor ole bloke," said Fullick, slapping the sick animal's dripping neck. "Wot a game this be—for man an' beast."

From the dimly lighted tents below the paddock came a rough voice lifted in song. The words were familiar to us all, a sort of camp joke:

W'y did I leave me 'appy 'ome?
W'y did I join the arm—y?
W'y did I come to sunny France?
I must a' been bloomin' well balm—y.

"Were you?" I asked Fullick.

"Not balmy—bloody drunk, I was."

I offered a few platitudinous suggestions as to swearing off, pulling himself together and the like.

"Lor' love yer, matey," whined Fullick. "Wot's the bleedin' good. I'm an ole, wore-out bloke. The drink's all there be for the likes o' me. 'Oo cares wot 'appens to me? Nobody. They ain't a soul in the world 'oo'd give a tinker's ——"

"But there must be some one, somewhere," I urged. "Who is it you're expecting a letter from? It must be something special, you seem so anxious about it every evening."

Fullick pulled at his pipe for a moment before replying.

"Well, y'see, its like this 'ere, matey: I 'ad a wife once, before—well before I was like as you know me, quite. She got a deevorce, nine years ago. I ain't seen nor 'eard nothin' of 'er since. But w'en I 'listed I write a letter to 'er brother an' asked 'im to send it on t'er. I thought as 'ow if she needed it I might be able t'get 'er some o' this ere 'lot ment money.

"But she ain't writ, so I s'pose as 'ow she didn't get my letter—or leastways don't need the money. I ain't been expectin' to 'ear from 'er the last few weeks, but I gets a sort o' comfort out of listenin' w'ile the cor'pral calls off the letters. A wore-out ole bloke like me can't expect nobody to be sendin' 'im lovin' messages, but it don't do no 'arm, do it, standin' eroun' an' listenin', an' sort o' makin' bets with yerself—now mebbey the next name'll be mine? No?—Well, p'raps the next—an' so on. Though it do send you away feelin' sort o' empty like."

Just then a guard at the other side of the paddock challenged sharply.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Orderly officer," came the stern, quiet response.

Fullick slipped under the picket rope, slapped an opening between two horses huddling together for comfort, and made for his own post. Somehow I couldn't get him out of my mind during the rest of that dreary vigil.

The next evening, when, after "letters up," I had seen Fullick's lingering figure shamble off in the mud, I told the postman-corporal what I had learned on night guard.

"The poor ole bleeder," said the corporal. "She won't write 'im, nor nobody else. An' Christmas a-comin', an' all the boys gettin' parcels from 'ome. Rough on an ole cove like 'im, out 'ere alone, an' nobody in the world to send 'im so much as a 'Merry Christmas' post-card."

"Well, it's his fault, I suppose," I said; but that didn't make Fullick's lot any happier.

THEN came the bright idea. The London *Daily Sketch* in my hand provided the inspiration. It published a column urging its readers to send in Christmas parcels, to be distributed by the *Sketch* to soldiers at the front having no friends or relatives to send them presents. The article requested the donors to inclose a letter in their parcels addressed to "My dear soldier."

I took the corporal into my confidence.

"Just the ticket," he commented.

I swore him to secrecy and proceeded to write a note to *Sketch.* I lied shamelessly. I told them Fullick was an old veteran of the Boer war who wanted to do something for his country and had enlisted in the A. S. C. I admitted he was no hero but emphasized his friendless state and urged that unless the *Sketch* sent him one of its parcels he would have a pitifully thin Christmas.

During the ensuing fortnight Fullick singled me out for his attentions. I was not flattered. Usually it was some little thing he wanted—tobacco, cigarets, the price of a pint of beer, that brought him to my tent.

At times I grew caustic. Then he would squint at me through his bleary eyes, into which the tears of senility so easily sprang, and humble himself like a mangy, loving dog.

"Don't be 'ard on me, matey," he'd plead. "Ain't you the only friend I've got in all this 'ere bloomin' camp. Don't be 'ard on a wore-out ole bloke like me. I need a pint, Gawd knows I need it, matey."

And he'd get it. In fact I arranged with him to come to me every night for thrippence to get that pint. He accepted his allotment gratefully. He fawned upon me on all occasions. I became his "little ole brown son," his "dear ole matey" and his "good ole toff" by turns. Once, at least, he proved his gratitude in no mean fashion.

It was on my next night guard, and a raging devil of a night it was, half rain, half sleet, half snow, with a gnawing wind howling down from the north, the horses stamping and tugging at their head-ropes on the verge of a stampede. Mine was to be the second watch, midnight to four o'clock. Fullick had the early trick.

I made myself a snug bed among the hay-trusses in the forage tent beside the paddock. Fullick was to awaken me at twelve to relieve him.

I awoke to find him crawling into the hay beside me.

"Twelve already?" I grumbled, sleepily.

"It's all right, me little ole brown son," said Fullick, "Go back to sleep. It's turned four. I done yer watch for yer."

The days dragged on toward Christmas. Each day it rained steadily, mercilessly, from morning until night. Each day we splashed about that sea of mud, once a huge dry pasture land, laboring ceaselessly in the rain. Each evening that crescent of bedraggled Ally Slopers gathered outside our tent to the corporal's cry of "letters up!" Always the last to drag himself away was Fullick.

Christmas Eve came and brought with it ten bags of mail for the Ally Slopers. We tentmates of the postman-corporal helped him lug the sacks over from the Orderly room by the main gate. All the men turned out that evening to "letters up." Nearly every man in the depot got a parcel or at least a letter.

Many of the parcels were queer and humble: a pair of hand-knit socks and plug of tobacco from a cottage on the moors of Scotland; a shirt and a plum-cake from a miner's hut near Newcastle; a package of cheap cigarets and tin of peppermint bulls-eyes from Hodge Alley, Whitechapel; two cotton handkerchiefs, a crumbly home-made cake and a tinsel Christmas card from Sunderland.

There were bigger parcels, too, filled with pleasant home-cooked goodies and soft woolen things. Came hundreds of little cylindrical plum-puddings; crisp slabs of buttery Scotch short-bread; cakes of chocolate; thousands of "fags," as Tommy calls cigarets. Of the hundreds of ragged, disreputable looking Ally Slopers there was not one, so far as we could tell, who did not have some one back in "Blytie" to remember him, except Fullick.

But the *Sketch* had not failed us. We kept that substantial, square parcel to the last. Then the corporal stuck his head out of the tent and called to the stooping figure shambling off in the darkness.

"Package for you, Fullick."

The figure halted, turned, hung back.

"Raggin' an ole bloke on Christmas Eve?" queried the plaintive voice from the darkness.

I reassured him over the corporal's shoulder. Still doubtfully, but with a sort of wistful hopefulness, old Fullick came to the tent door and peered in through blinking, watery eyes. I held up his parcel and he began to tremble as if with ague. We drew him inside and set him on my rolled-up bed-kit, the package between his bony knees.

"Strapper Fullick, No. 2680, A. S. C., Remount Depot, No. 1 Base, British Expedishunry Force, France," he read slowly. "Gawd bli' me, that's me right ernough. Now 'oo'd ye s'pose ud be sendin' a bloke like me a parcel like this 'ere? Wot's in it, d'ye s'pose."

"Better open it and find out," I suggested, handing him my knife to cut the strings.

It was a laborious operation for the palsied, swollen fingers. We watched in silence as he removed the wrappings. His face, in the flicker of the candle-light, appeared transformed. It's ugly lines were softened; his eyes shone; his trembling lips, purple with cold, parted in a twisted sort of smile. He disclosed a square biscuit tin and removed the cover.

"Wot's this 'ere? Lor' lummy, a muffler! And 'and knit it be, too—look at that, matey."

He wound the warm, brown, knitted thing about his scrawny neck.

"Mittens! Strike me pink—look at 'em! Jus' look at 'em!

He drew them over his weather-beaten knuckles and held them out for our inspection, like a child.

I looked at the corporal. He blew his nose violently into a new khaki handkerchief.

"Bli' me," he muttered.

Fullick resumed his fumbling in the biscuit tin of treasures.

"Fags!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "Best Virginia gold leaf—Lor' lummy—an' a pipe! 'Ow's that, eh? Look at that, now—ain't that a little beauty. Must o' cost all o' two bob. It did, s'elp me. 'Baccy, 'arf a pound, navy cut. Socks, two pair on 'em. Look at 'em, mates. Gawd! An' wot's this 'ere? A shirt—ain't it wunnerful? Feel it, matey—ain't it sof' an' smooth—a shirt wot is a shirt. An' me wot 'asn't 'ad a change in two months.

"Wot's this—biscuit, sweet 'uns. An' toffy—Lor! I ain't et no toffy in ten year. An' 'ere's sumpin' else—'eavy it be. Wot's this? S'elp me—a plum-puddin'—'ome-made—a 'ome-made plum-puddin'. Gawd strike me!"

His voice dried up in a faint squeak and the ready tears gushed from his eyes and splashed in little thumps on the pudding-tin. The corporal rose hastily.

"Gotta take somethin' to the sergeant-major," he explained thickly, as he dove out the door.

"Is that all?" I asked Fullick, after a little.

"Looks to be," he answered, searching the tin. "No—'eres a letter. Look at that, now—'My dear soldier.' Looks like a kiddy's 'andwritin'. Open it mate—I—I can't see none too good, t'night."

I spread the sheet of paper to the candle-light and read aloud the childish scrawl:

> I'm only a little girl, but I know a lot about the war and what our brave soldiers are doing for us. We heard you had nobody to write to you so mamma and I thought we would send you this Christmas

parcel. I hope you will like the things. I knitted the muffler myself. If you are lonely write to me and I will answer. Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

ELSIE BAIN,
47 Trowbridge Road, Kensington.

Fullick sat hunched over his treasures, weeping softly, bitterly. It was not a pretty thing to see that rum-soaked old tramp crying like a woman. I turned away and waited. After a while I spoke to him. I suggested that he answer the child and thank her for her gifts.

"You do it for me, matey," he urged between gulps. "I ain't skilled at letter writin'. Besides, me 'ands is cramped with cold an' wet. You do it."

"What shall I say," I asked, taking my letter-pad on my knee and arranging the candles.

"Jus' tell 'er as 'ow I got 'em—an' as 'ow I was glad—an' as 'ow I'm a wore-out bloke an' not no 'ero, but 'ope she won't be sorry 'er parcel didn't go to a real Tommy, up in the trenches."

And that is about what I wrote her. Fullick approved of my effort, heartily. We sealed it, addressed it and dropped it in the out-going mail-sack.

It was a new Fullick that went about his work the next few days. There was a spring to his step, his shoulders were straighter, his eyes brighter. Not that he gave promise of complete reformation. He still craved and got his daily pint of beer and, no doubt, had the means been to hand would have indulged in one of his old-time fights to a finish with the Demon Rum, without a qualm.

But he held his head up among the men and spoke ceaselessly of his "little matey" back in "Blytie," who had sent him all these wonderful things, and from whom he expected another letter soon.

NEW YEAR'S day brought the first bit of glorious weather we had known in two months. The ground froze over night and by the time the sun had climbed above the valley we went about our work lightly, almost joyously. The weather-beaten horses, too, sniffed the sunshine and stamped the frozen mud with every manifestation of a new interest in life.

By noon the highway flanking the camp thronged with visitors from the city, taking advantage of this unwonted combination of fine weather and holiday to get out in the country and see the great camp of *"les Anglais,"* at close range. The activities of a troop of Indian cavalry preparing to go to the front attracted the mass of visitors, who packed the road in front of the Indian kraal. Below the crowd the heavy columns of Ally Slopers, riding one horse and leading two, pounded up the road and turned in at the big gate.

We had all we could do to handle our horses that morning. Bitterly we cursed the inefficiency of the supply department in not furnishing us bits and bridles. To manage three obstreperous horses, their heads tied closely together by their halter-ropes, with nothing but a rope passed about the nose of one's mount, is one of the little things we were presumed to be experts in.

Most of us had got our horses safely back to the stable lines from exercise and water, when what we were fearing happened. From down the road came the frightened shouts of men and the pound of heavy hoofs beating the tattoo of full gallop.

We could see the column of "Remounts" rearing and plunging, as along its edge came thundering a trio of runaways. Straight and true, their heads together like trained fire-engine horses, the big animals tore up the highway toward that suddenly shrieking jam of visitors.

An awkward, lanky figure, in a flopping stocking-cap strove vainly to stop his maddened charges. At a glance we knew it was old Fullick. We knew, too, the futility of his effort to pull up three runaway light-draft horses with a single halter-rope. Riding the near or left-hand horse, old Fullick tugged with all his puny strength at the loop of rope in his hands, his striving urging the beasts to even greater speed.

There remained one chance. Habit might incline those galloping brutes to turn in at the gate if we could block the road and frighten them with waving arms and frantic shouts. We tried it. They swerved not a jot and instinctively we jumped aside to let them through.

I caught a glimpse of Fullick's face as he rocketed by. It was ashen with terror. Another moment and those pounding hoofs would be beating down the nearest of those shrieking groups of men, women and children fighting to get up the road.

Then we saw Fullick do the only thing to be done. The right-hand edge of the road had been opened into a deep ditch, in which pipes for our new waterworks were to be laid. We saw Fullick snatch his old stocking-cap from his head and whip it fiercely again and again into the eyes of his two led horses. With his open left-hand he reached over and cuffed his mount heavily on the left side of its face.

Fullick's mount swerved against the center animal, which in turn reared and plunged sideways against the off horse. This brute, to avoid the stinging blows of the stocking-cap, lurched to the right, slipped and plunged into the excavation. The rest was just a mighty scramble of great bodies and striking hoofs.

We disentangled the struggling animals and got them to their feet. Under them all, at the bottom of the ditch, lay what was left of old Fullick. His battered and torn body still held life as a stretcher bore him swiftly to No. 5 Base Hospital across the fields.

That evening the corporal handed me a letter addressed in a scrawling hand to Fullick. I took it over to the hospital.

"You can't see him, he's dying," the nurse in charge of Fullick's ward-tent told me.

Briefly I told her about the Christmas box and showed her the envelope I had for Fullick. Her face softened.

"I think it will be all right to read it to him," she said, leading me into the marquee. On a cot in a corner under a white carbide lamp lay Fullick. His head was swathed in a huge bandage that came well down over his eyes. His knotted, grimy hands clutched at the white coverlet with black, broken finger-nails.

I spoke to him softly. His lips parted in a husky whisper.

"It's—me little—ole—brown—son."

"I've got your letter—from the kiddy," I said. "Shall I read it?"

He lifted a hand a little way from the bed and opened and shut his fingers. I put the envelope in them. For a few moments he lay silently holding the letter. A slight tinge of color centered in his unshaven cheeks.

"Read—it," he whispered.

I opened the letter.

"Wot's wrong, matey?" came the whisper. "Carn't yer make out the kiddy's writin'?"

"It's all right," I answered hastily. "Just a little scrawly—hard to read. Listen:

> My Dear Soldier: Of course I'm glad you got the parcel and not somebody else. You must not be lonely any more. Write to me often. I will answer every time. I wish you could see my puppy. He is a pug. Even if you don't fight in the trenches you are a soldier and are doing your bit. I believe you are just as brave as any soldier. Keep up your spirits. Write soon. Your loving little friend,
>
> Elsie.

A profound peace seemed to settle upon that torn old figure on the cot. He was silent a long time, while I sat staring at that letter. Then again came that hoarse whisper. There was more strength to it; a different tone, almost a rough sweetness.

"Arnswer it—matey—arfter—arfter I'm done. Tell 'er 'ow it 'appened. Tell 'er as 'ow I seen them kiddies—in the road—an' thought of 'er—an' done—the best I could."

I promised. One hand fluttered on the coverlet.

"Le' me—le' me 'old the letter, matey."

The whisper was very faint, now I looked at the letter again and beckoned to the nurse, who was standing by with the look of calm, kind motherhood behind her thick glasses. I whispered to her.

"Absolutely certain. Internal hemorrhage. Before morning," she whispered back.

I held the letter so she could read it over my shoulder. It was in the writing of an illiterate woman. The scrawl on the envelope had deceived me. The real letter was short and cruelly to the point. It read:

> I got your letter about enlisting. I don't want nothing to do with you or your money. I am married to a good man now. He doesn't even know my first husband was a drunken thief and a jailbird. Leave me alone.

The nurse looked at me through her tears.

"The poor old thing," she whispered. "And he dying like a real hero."

Silently I folded the letter, put it in its envelope and placed it in the limp fingers on the coverlet. They closed upon it, ever so slightly. The livid lips twisted into a sort of smile.

"Good night, Fullick," I said.

The lips barely moved and I bent over to hear the reply.

" 'Night, me—good—ole matey," it came faintly.

I went out into the night. It had begun raining again.

THE RELOCATION OF MONTANA CREEK by

A TALE OF DAWSON DAYS

SAMUEL ALEXANDER WHITE

Author of "The Spoilsman," "The Posts of Pillage," etc.

"GO ON and drop that moose, Bassett!" Eric Sark urged his partner. "Your deliberateness is sure exasperating, and there's a dog-team sifting up Indian River this lurid minute. Drop him, I say, or that outfit'll scare him skin-bald clean up to the Clear Lake country!"

"Don't fluster yourself, pardner!" retorted Tom Bassett, who, hidden in a spruce clump half-way between Montana and Eureka Creeks, had his quarry marked down three hundred yards away across a little cañon. "He's got to take another step before I shoot. Thar's only his head and bell visible, and moose ain't so plentiful in the Indian River districk this Winter that a man kin afford to miss one. That dog-team'll be Burge Kivre's comin' up from Dawson City. It was jist about here we spoke him goin' down day before yesterday. Burge is a wise guy, all right. You wave your hand and he'll stop."

Sark crawled out on his belly to the river-bank and waved to the flying Kivre for a halt. The latter caught the signal. He threw his weight back upon the gee-pole, brought his dogs to a sudden stop and geed them swiftly around toward the bank.

"Say, boys—" he shouted.

And Bassett's rifle cracked. For at the sound of Kivre's voice the moose had taken, not a step, but a twelve-foot jump forward.

"Tarnation!" apologized Kivre. "I didn't know that was the play. Did you get him, Tom?"

"Sure did," grinned Bassett, still holding his rifle at the ready and watching the snow fly up in the death-wallow three hundred yards away. "Fair back of the shoulder! But you nearly unflapped the flapjacks, Burge!"

"It was plumb careless of me. But when Eric waved at me, I wasn't thinking about game. I was thinking about yourselves. I been watching for you all along to give you the hint. Wasn't it on Montana Creek you told me the other day you staked a claim?"

"Montana Creek, yes," replied Sark. "We staked one claim in Tom's name. That's why we wanted the moose so bad. We're all out of grub, and we needed the meat to stay on and prove her up. I haven't surrendered my rights in the valley yet, but if she shows as much as we have reason to believe she will I'll stake another in my own name."

"No, you won't," informed Kivre pointedly. "That's what I wanted to tell you. There's a stampede on Montana, and she's overflowing to the bench grounds with men. They heeled me out of Dawson and passed me as if I was sitting at bacon and beans. The creek was plumb plastered when I swung by."

"Ding - blast it!" ejaculated Bassett. "Who in blazes put 'em wise to Montana?"

"I didn't. You boys confided in me

offhand like and never imposed any oaths of secrecy on me, but I tell you straight I didn't articulate an artless sound. Still, the word's come out of nowhere as it always does, rising like the mist in the valley or falling like a feather in the air. I didn't know where the exodus was headed until I came to Montana, and then I remembered about your claim. Now if I were in your moccasins, boys, I'd be smoke-tanning it down to look after that claim. Casino Charlie, Ante Baker, Gunboat Kane and a lot more slippery customers from Dawson City are in on the stampede."

"By thunder, then that's what we will be doin' inside ten sizzlin' seconds!" declared Bassett. "And we got to leave the moose till later. Here, Burge, lay the empty shell on him when you go by as a symbol of possession. Our dog-team's down in yon gulch below."

"All right," promised Burge, taking the shell and waving them good-luck as they rushed off for the gulch, "I'll tag him for you. There's nothing else I can do for you? The new Gold Commissioner and Captain Constantine are up on Eureka straightening out some claim disputes. If you think there's any chance of a mix-up on Montana, I'll send them down."

"Who?" demanded Sark, whirling and running sidewise in his stride. "Tom Fawcett and Cap. Constantine? They're on Eureka, eh? Well, I'll tell you what, Burge! You dress and quarter that moose for us and hoist the meat into a tree with the dogs. We'll be down on Montana before you get done. If there's any mix-up over our claim, I'll fire five shots. You answer with two if you get me."

OUT of the gulch wherein they had secreted their dog-team during the stalk of the moose, Sark and Bassett haled the five big MacKenzie River huskies and dashed down-river. They traveled at top speed, and the snow-smoke of their going hung in the air for one hundred yards behind them as they switched up Montana, which flowed into Indian River on the left limit. There was a scene of a vast activity. From source to mouth the creek limits were fully staked.

Back on the bench grounds and hill-tops men were pacing, on the forlorn hope of the pay extending that far, while on the creek-ice itself stood many disappointed groups who had not been graced with even this forlorn chance—men who were out of it and knew they were out of it and who extended each other sympathy and the gossip of Montana's miles.

"What's chasing you?" these asked as the plunging outfit of Sark and Bassett lumbered up. "You're too late to get in."

"We're already in," Tom retorted, "and we're only lookin' for our claim. Previous location, you geezers!"

"Oh! Previous location, eh? That's it? Well, if you want to know, everybody on this creek's been mighty previous in location, and you'll do blame well if you find your claim in the shuffle. We'll just go along and see you do it."

In a solid gang that momentarily increased in size the crowd followed Sark and Bassett. In cases of this kind there was generally something to be seen, and the crowd knew Tom and Eric as men prone to impose their will in retention of their rights.

Straight up the creek the partners tore till they came to an out-thrusting bluff which projected creekwards like a spur from the ridge behind the bench ground.

"The lower boundary of our claim was fifteen hundred feet from the base of that bluff," spoke Bassett. "I measured it accurately, because there wasn't no other way to fix its location. Eric, you pace her off. But pace it on the ice. Ginks with fresh-drove stakes don't take kindly to anybody meanderin' over their holdin's."

Carefully, and using a uniform stride, Sark paced five hundred steps. Behind him moved the dog-team and behind the dog-team moved the scores of onlookers, each pacing for his private satisfaction the stated distance from the bluff.

"Fifteen hundred!" announced Sark, scraping a mark in the snow with his moccasined toe.

"Right you are," corroborated many of the crowd.

"Yes, sir, you've hit it," declared Bassett. "I remember a leetle alder near the lower center stake. Yonder she is. Now who's the brazen, beggar pretendin' to blaze a base-line we've already blazed?"

"Casino Charlie, or I'm a soused Siwash!" exclaimed Sark.

"Precisely," grinned Casino. "Surprised to see me? You might know when a stampede starts from Dawson that I'd be in the van. You boys get staked yet?"

"Yes," Sark told him, "four days ago. Right where you stand. And you get to blazes off the spot!"

Eric reached for him, ax and all, as he spoke and jerked him sidewise off the creek-bank. Casino described an acrobatic air-swing, hurtled through the foremost ranks of the roaring crowd and landed in the middle of the ice. He was on his feet in a moment, his face contorted with pain and rage and the fallen ax in his hands. But at that moment Sark's rifle spat in the air over his head, spat and continued to spit as fast as Eric could work the lever. At the first shot Casino dropped the ax again. At the second shot he shoved his arms in air, and at each succeeding report the arms stretched aloft another full inch.

After the fifth shot Sark paused, while far up Eureka way, faint as the bark of a child's toy-gun, came Burge Kivre's answering pop-pop. Kivre had got him all right, and the wireless message to Gold Commissioner Thomas Fawcett and Captain Constantine of the Mounted Police was on its way.

"Now," laughed Eric grimly, "those five shots were only for practise and to warm up the barrel. The next five'll make a porous-plaster of you, Casino, if you don't dissolve yourself mighty sudden. Get up onto your friend Ante Baker's ground or down on to Gunboat Kane's. For it's an easy guess that they're staked on either side of you to cover up your boundary sins!"

"All right," gritted Casino malevolently, as he cringed away up-creek toward Ante Baker's claim, "you got the say-so just for the fightin' minute. But your fightin' minute won't last long, and you nor your partner ain't goin' to stay on that ground long."

"Aren't we?" Sark bellowed. "We'll stay till the Gold Commissioner gets here. Savvy that? We'll hold the ground in trust. You've made away with our location notices, but that doesn't give you the claim. Fawcett'll be the final arbiter."

"Fawcett!" snarled Casino. "Goin' to send for him, eh? A whale of a lot of good that'll do you. Ante and Gunboat and me'll blow you to Mars and Jupiter before he gets here!"

"Then you'll have to blow thundering fast. He'll be here before night. And if you value your sordid skin, don't set foot on this claim before he comes."

Casino deemed the Commissioner's coming only a bluff, and since dark suited him better than daylight under the menace of Sark's rifle he was content to wait till night. But just as gloom of the early evening drew in he saw something that backed the bluff.

UP THE creek, going at full gallop and covered with sifted snow and the rime of the run, came the outfit of Fawcett and Captain Constantine. Tom Bassett was on the watch for them by the creek-bank. He hailed them loudly, and at his hail they swung in.

"You fellers sure ain't bin prodigal with time," chuckled Tom. "How'd you make it so smokin' fast?"

"Kivre met us up-bound for Australia Creek just at Eureka's mouth," informed the Gold Commissioner, shaking off the snow. "Turned us down. Five minutes later he wouldn't have got us. What's the trouble here, Tom?"

"Claim-jumpin's a mild epithet for it. Sark and me staked this ground four days ago, when the creek laid white and clean as a new rabbit-skin blanket. We was up-river a piece killin' grub when Kivre told us thar was a big stampede in behind us. And what did we see when we lit down but Casino squattin' here. Bin spyin' on us evidently, swipin' our ground and puttin' all Dawson wise. Eric plumb sky-straddled him offa it and put it in trust till you arrived.

"We're law-abidin' men, and you've got the proper authority to pass on anythin' like this. It's your pass, Fawcett, but while you're passin' jist remember we want our claim back. She sampled well. She's the best claim on the creek, because we had the choice of the hull creek when we staked her. The outthrust of the bluff catches the alluvial drift here. And look at the pitch of the cañon! That spells concentration. Accordin' to our estimate, that claim's worth forty thousand dollars if it's worth a measly ounce. Oh, I tell you, placid and patient, Fawcett, we want her back!"

"That all you have to tell me?"

"No. I know the approximate distance from the mouth up to the bluff yonder, and thar seems to me too many men in for the ground. I ain't measured it, but it strikes me that way. More'n that, they's only Gunboat Kane and one other man between us and the bluff, whar thar should be three men. I ain't bin above, but I expeck it's the same all the way up. It looks wrong, Fawcett. The hull creek looks wrong."

"Well," decided the Gold Commissioner, "there's only one thing to do, and that's to measure. Most of the boys know me, and they know Captain Constantine also. They'll not object to us coming officially on to their claims."

Fawcett produced a steel measuring-tape and, accompanied by Constantine, Sark, Bassett and the crowd of non-stakers who had gathered to await developments, sledded down to Montana's mouth. To facilitate the measuring in the deepening gloom, brush fires were kindled on the claims, and a score of men in the crowd carried big torches of gummy spruce knots.

From the first it was evident that something was wrong with the ground, but the Commissioner said nothing till the party came to Ante Baker's claim, where Ante, Gunboat and Casino were conspiring together and discussing ways and means to meet the uneasy situation. And there, after due measurement of Ante's holdings, Fawcett delivered himself from the tally in his note-book.

"Below the bluff," he proclaimed, "I find fifteen men in where there should be only twelve; that is, fifteen four-hundred-foot claims instead of twelve five-hundred-foot ones. The first location above the bluff, belonging to Jess Tolume, runs the orthodox five hundred. Gunboat Kane's, next it, measures seven hundred and fifty——"

A howl of protest broke from the crowd.

"Robber! Pirate! Mud-wallowin' hogger!" rang the medley of anathemas.

"Shut up!" ordered Captain Constantine.

"The ground jointly claimed by Bassett and Casino," Fawcett went on, "runs seven hundred and fifty, too, and likewise Ante Baker's."

"It measured only five hundred feet when Eric and I staked it!" announced Bassett.

"I don't doubt it, Tom," returned the Commissioner. "And that accounts for but two men being in between you and the bluff where there should have been three. Savvy? Tolume's five hundred, Gunboat's seven hundred and fifty, and two hundred and fifty added onto your original limits makes the fifteen hundred. Now I'd like to know how these claims were measured. Paced, eh?"

"No," clamored the crowd; "with a rope belonging to Casino—a fifty-foot rope. Ten lengths of her gave one claim."

"Ten lengths!" echoed the Commissioner. "Then that rope was ten feet short. A forty-foot rope, boys, instead of a fifty-foot one. But how does your ground run true, Tolume? Didn't you measure with Casino's rope?"

"I paced mine," informed Tolume. "Over the snout of the bluff yonder it wasn't very easy to use the rope. So I just stepped her off."

"Pretty lucky for you, then! You hit her dead to within inches of five hundred feet, and it's the only legal claim I've seen so far. But what about these overgrown ones? What happened your rope when it got up as far as Gunboat's ground, Casino? Begin to stretch?"

"How in blazes do I know?" flared Casino. "The creek was stampeded in the dark of the mornin', and you know blame well it's easy to make mistakes in the dark and excitement and all. Don't you go accusin' me of under-measurin' or over-measurin' either. You ain't got no grounds for them accusations, and if you persist, Commissioner or no Commissioner, I'll sure have you up in Dawson for slander and defamation of character."

"Like thunder you will!" laughed Fawcett. "You're colossally conceited to think there's anything to defame. Where's the rope that was used in measuring?"

"Up at the head of Montana, I guess. Tyin' some one's dogs, most like, or holdin' in somebody else's tent-pegs."

"Yes, or shredded into tow to kindle that fire of yours," retorted the Commissioner. "I suppose there's no use in looking for it. So we'll just go on with our measuring and see where we jump off."

Since it took the lengths of ten creek claims and a little over to total a mile, and since there were several miles of Montana stakings, this operation consumed much time. It was long after midnight when the Gold Commissioner finished and called all the stampeders into a huge council. On top of a four-foot stump he stood by one of the claim-fires half-way down Montana and set forth the situation in explicit terms.

"It's exactly the same above as below," he declaimed. "The claims run in general four hundred feet, stretching out in spots to six hundred, seven hundred, seven hundred and fifty and even eight hundred feet. It's not easy to detect the differences with the naked eye, on account of the inequalities of the bank, but the tape betrays the trick. It's been well done. The longest claims are on the roughest spots. Where the bank glides level, the stakings keep down nearer the lawful size. And the funny thing about it all is that that rope always shrank for other people and always began to stretch when it struck the territory of some of Casino's friends."

An ominous growl arose from the throng of stakers and they turned on Casino.

"String the tarnation thief up!" several yelled.

"Come on, then, and string!" invited Casino belligerently, as, flanked by Ante Baker and Gunboat Kane and backed by nearly a score for whom the rope had stretched, he leered out of the formidable bunch. "You don't happen to remember that the law's on this creek, do you? Come on, I say, if your memory's so wilted, and we'll sure give you all the recollection you want and a little reminiscence on the side."

Mouthing angry imprecations at the challenge, the foremost ranks of the crowd surged forward. They collided with Casino's body-guard in an effort to seize Casino himself, and deadlocked there for an instant on the snowy creek bank. Wild shouts and wilder threats flew back and forth through the frosty air, and several blows were struck. Things began to look ugly, and many axheads rose in the throng, but into the mêlée rushed Captain Constantine, aided by Sark and Bassett, and shouldered the combatants a few feet apart.

"Now quit it while the quitting's good," ordered Constantine. "Quit it, I tell you, before I have to lambaste some one over the head with a gun-butt. The Commissioner's running this side-show and he can run it a thundering lot better than you. Starting rough-house and stringing people up isn't going to land you anywhere but on the Barracks' wood-pile!"

"Yes, boys," Bassett urged, "take the Captain's advice and sit tight for a minnit. Casino's stabbed me deeper 'n anybody, and I ain't rattlin' no bear teeth about it. So you jist take a jolt of opiate calm and conserve all your surplus energy till Fawcett's unbosomed himself. I think mebbe you'll need all your steam about then. Go ahead, Commissioner, and say what's what."

"You see how it stands," Fawcett continued in the surly quiet that ensued. "Jess Tolume's is the only legally held claim on the creek. I've surveyed a lot of creeks and seen a lot of muddles in my time, but I never saw a muddle like this one. I'm convinced that it was caused by the trickery of Casino. I'm convinced that he stole Bassett's claim. I'd like to declare his right of location here forfeited and put him on the wood-pile for about twelve months for claim-jumping and unlawful staking, but I haven't a particle of proof.

"I can't prove it wasn't a natural mistake in the dark and in the excitement. Therefore Casino goes foot-loose and free. There can't be anything done about him. Yet there can be something done about the creek. There are two ways out of the muddle. Here's one of them:

"A start can be made at the mouth and my true measurements of the base-lines used to give each man a full five-hundred-foot claim. That'll shift each man in rotation a piece up-creek. It won't affect Jess Tolume's claim because the fifteen four-hundred-foot claims below him make just twelve five-hundred-foot ones, and the shift'll go round him and work on above just the same. How does that plan sound to you?"

"It isn't fair, Commissioner," criticized Sark, speaking for the crowd. "Down there at the mouth men'll be getting only part of the ground they originally staked. All the way up they'll be getting less and less. Toward the head they'll be maybe a mile or so above the claims they used to own. What's more, on account of the five-hundred-foot length instead of four hundred, there'll be a lot of men squeezed out at the top with no claims at all. To be sure the over-measured ground of Casino's gang'll accommodate some of these, but it won't accommodate all by a thousand-yard shot."

"I know it," nodded Fawcett. "You've spotted the drawbacks of that plan. So many'll lose ground altogether and so many'll be on strange stakings, farther from the mouth than they were before!"

"And Eric and me'll lose our claim altogether at that rate of goin'," Tom Bassett protested. "It'll go to the first of the three men shifted up from below the bluff. We'll git none at all. You've failed to git Casino with the goods on him. Thar's no evidence to prove we staked. We'll be left out in the frost with the cabin door shut and our feet in a waterhole. Fawcett, surely to northern gods, you have some better medicine than that?"

"What does the crowd think about it?" demanded the Commissioner impartially.

"Sark said it," vociferated the crowd. "We all want to share and share alike. Not a man of us wants to shove anybody else out, and not a man of us wants to be shoved out by anybody else. What's your other plan?"

"The other plan," announced Fawcett, with an eloquent sweep of his arm, "is to relocate Montana Creek!"

A cheer burst from the non-stakers who had not been lucky enough to get in at first.

"Hurroo!" they exulted. "Splendiferous! Relocate it is!"

And those who had already staked caught their enthusiasm and swelled their cheers. For this abrupt option of the Gold Commissioner's struck hot their imagination and stirred their riotous blood. According to the other suggestion their ground was going to be shifted anyway. What they might get would be only a lottery, and many of them would draw blanks. Whereas in this proposition they would get exactly what they staked and recorded, and there were equal chances for all.

That several would be in the running for each of the many prizes only provided more excitement and called for stiffer qualities of manhood in the winners. So they hailed the idea of relocation with acclaim and feverishly urged Fawcett to begin the game.

"You like it, eh?" chuckled the Commissioner amid their clamor. "I'm glad of that. The other switch wouldn't be fair at all. This is. I knew it would get you. But still both plans have to be duly voted upon by those concerned. All in favor of a shift of the claims shove up their fists!"

Casino and his gang pawed the air, but they could muster no more than a score or so of votes.

"All in favor of relocation!"

Three hundred fur gauntlets and woolen mittens wriggled in the frosty night.

"Carried," announced Fawcett, and waved off the storm of protest from Casino, Ante, Gunboat and the rest. "Go to thunder, you hoggish kickers. You're outvoted and that settles it. You take your chance with the others, and I hope to blazes you get badly trimmed. Tom Bassett and Eric Sark, I presume there's no balk coming from you now?"

"No," answered Sark promptly, "there isn't. It puts us under heavy odds. You see Casino'll concentrate certain of his gang on that promising claim of ours. We'll be under odds of two or three or four to one, but that doesn't matter. We don't want to block the general move for good. We're dead game sports and we accept those heavy odds. Go on with your relocation."

"All right, Eric. On we go. To prevent outsiders squeezing in on this the plan'll have to be carried out at once. It's nearly four o'clock in the morning now. I'll throw Montana Creek, with the exception of one legal claim held by Jess Tolume, open for relocation at six. That'll give everybody a chance to overhaul their sleds, harness the dogs and allow the upper stakers time to make the head of the creek. At six the race begins. The starters' gun-shots'll signal the take-off.

"Since Jess Tolume isn't running, he'll act as starter at the head. Captain Constantine'll do the same midway, and I'll go down to the mouth myself. When the guns go off, you stake and get to the recording office at Dawson City as fast as dog-flesh'll let you. But first pick out what claim you're going to try for. I numbered them all as I measured, and I have here a list of all the stakers and non-stakers. You choose and have your stakes blazed and written ready with the number of the claim you've set your heart on. Then all you'll have to do is drive them!"

IMMEDIATELY great rifts split the crowd. This development called for dynamic activity. They had been content to rest that afternoon after having staked without recording for the time being. Under the mining regulations, if they were ten miles from the recording office of the district wherein they staked, they had ten days to file their ground, and for each additional ten miles of distance an additional day.

Montana Creek was in the Dawson Mining District. The recording office was at Dawson City, about forty miles away. Therefore the stakers had had thirteen days to file and had not been in a hurry, preferring first to blaze out the boundary-lines and do other necessary work upon the claims. But now when the claims were discovered to be of illegal length and hopelessly jumbled and the creek was thrown open for relocation by Fawcett, that is to say, declared virgin ground just as it was before ever a stake was driven, there was need for desperate haste.

Now the claims belonged to nobody, or rather there were no claims other than the measurements of Fawcett upon a piece of open creek. They had to be staked afresh. There were many stakers for any one claim, but the man who would get any one claim to hold for his own was the man who first recorded it in Dawson City. The others who also staked it would lose out in the grim race. Hence the turmoil in the crowd.

Sections surged this way and that. They leaped upon their sleds and whipped off or ran at top speed to find their anchored outfits. Pandemonium broke loose on the creek, and many were the preliminary skirmishes fought between men and beasts for advantageous positions all up and down Montana's length.

At the last word of the Gold Commissioner's proclamation Ante Baker broke downcreek and out of Montana's mouth with his dog-team. In the general disorder his move was not noticed by many; but Sark, who was keeping strict watch upon Casino and his gang, was one of the few who saw him.

"Ante's gone," he protested to the Commissioner. "I know what's up. Casino's on for staking our claim by proxy, and Ante's gone ahead to record."

"Ante's cut off," declared Fawcett, striking the name from his list of stakers. "They don't run any proxy game on me. Unless Casino stakes and records himself, he doesn't get a foot of ground. Every other man likewise. And I'll just bar any more dog-teams from leaving this creek before the relocation's under way."

"Scrumptious!" cheered Bassett. "You sure are the real goods, Fawcett—the stiff man in the rigid place. All we want is a fair start. Pardner, you go over the harness and stuff, as he says, and see that the outfit's all sound. I'll jump into the spruce and cut a new gee-pole. The one on the sledge is cracked."

Sark gave his whole outfit a thorough inspection. First of all he stripped the sledge to racing gear. Then he examined carefully the feet of each of the five dogs, biting out any ice that clung between their toes, for on the condition of the dogs' feet the ultimate outcome of the race might well depend. And finally, although there were no breaks in the harness, he strengthened several suspiciously weak spots that might give way at a critical moment and put them out of the running. All his preparations thus made, he took the team out on the creek ice and anchored it near where the lower center stake of Bassett's original claim would be driven.

"Aren't you going to take a chance yourself, Eric?" several men asked. "The creek, except Tolume's claim, is wide open to every one."

"No, I'm no game-hog," replied Sark. "There are a bunch of stakers here now for every claim, and they were here this last trip before I was. I know when it's good manners to stay out. I'm only running-mate with Bassett. He stakes our old ground."

Casino and Gunboat slid down the bank and located one outfit near Sark's. To Eric it was evident that Gunboat was going to act as Casino's running-mate, and he marked five more of Casino's friends with ready blazed and written stakes in their hands.

The odds were bigger than they had expected, he mentally calculated, and looked anxiously for Bassett's coming, for the minutes were creeping round to six o'clock. Bassett, however, was not to be seen and his partner began to bellow after him into the spruce.

"Oh, Tom!" he yelled. "Hurry up! It's getting near the start. Does it take you all night to cut a gee-pole?"

"I'm comin', pardner," Bassett yelled back. "Footin' it fast!"

He broke out of the spruce, the gee-pole in one hand and his mackinaw coat rolled up in the other. The pole he tossed to Sark to lash, while he commenced to bind his coat onto the sledge well toward the front.

"I'll run lighter in my parka," he breathed tersely.

"Then throw the coat away," advised Sark. "I've just stripped the sledge of every ounce I could. What you want to lug that thing for?"

"There's a bit of dog-feed in it."

"But we don't want dog-feed. For one thing you kill dogs' speed if you feed them in a race, and for another thing you can't stop to feed them. I tell you we can't possibly use that feed, Tom!"

"Pardner, I hate to dispute at this pressin' moment, but I tell you we can."

"But, blast it, you know yourself dogs shouldn't be fed in a run."

"It depends on the dogs. I've seen a

little dog feed at the right moment win many a race, and I'm jist goin' to be adamant and bind on this bundle."

"All right," Sark gave in, viciously jerking tight the last strand of the gee-pole's lashing, "you can have your way. It always takes days and weeks to change your mind, and I'm sure not going to try to do it in a few seconds. Get out onto the creek ice there with your stakes. It's two minutes to six by my watch."

Not only by Sark's watch, but by the watch of every man was it two minutes to six, for all who possessed watches had set them with the Gold Commissioner's, and those who carried none relied upon their posted fellows for the time and moved with their fellows out to the starting-line. The starting-line was the middle of the creek ice. Fawcett had so ruled, and there were drawn up all the entries in a race such as the Klondike had never seen before.

It was a sight that thrilled Sark and Bassett, old-timers as they were, a sight that set their blood pounding faster, their sinews all tingling and made them forget their late difference over the question of the dog-feed. Low-sunk like a snow-walled defile lay Montana Creek, hill-flanked, spruce-sentineled, along its twisted miles. A glare of brush fires beaconed its course, vying in brightness with the searchlight aurora and the blazing stars above.

The flames played forth over the creek ice, reddening the stream from bank to bank and etching out the tense parka and mackinaw clad figures, stakes and axes in hand, hunched forward on the starting-line awaiting the signal to stake, and upon the sledges, bunched in places closer to the bank, ready to bear the stakers on their way. The dogs seemed to have imbibed the spirit of the men. They plunged and bickered and snarled, and among them the flash of fangs and the howl of fury advertised a rivalry no less keen.

The second-hand of the watch Sark held ticked around on the sixtieth minute of the hour. It had almost gained it when he flipped the watch back into his pocket and stared fixedly at the tense line. Lucky Jess Tolume's signal up at the head of Montana was too far away to be caught by the stakers at this point. But Captain Constantine, half-way up, caught it on the stroke of six, and the men heard his gun crack and Fawcett's answer down at the mouth like an echo.

THE line surged forward. As far as Sark could see, both up and down the creek, there were scores straining in the first strides of the race. The ice shook under their stride.

They leaped upon the snowy bank as upon an enemy. Their axes flashed in the firelight over the lower center stakes, and beyond the scores that Eric saw he knew there were other scores leaping like these as upon an enemy with their ax-blades swinging red in the flames and their souls ablaze in competition. He counted ten men in the dash for Bassett's claim, three outsiders, Casino, five of Casino's gang and Tom himself.

Tom and Casino were in the lead. Their axes fell together upon their first stakes, and they were off running side by side, glaring into each other's faces like two belligerent huskies.

Lurching along the line of the lower boundary of the claim, they disappeared in the darkness beyond the range of the fire. After them into the darkness and hard on their heels plunged Casino's five friends.

Once into the gloom, Sark could not gage his partner's progress, but he had seen how the gang was heeling him and he began to have forebodings. He had a half-notion to rush off and back Tom up in the staking, but a wave of wisdom told him that he dared not leave the outfit. A tampering with the unguarded team or sledge might work worse disaster than a loss of time in locating. So all he could do was to sit tight and breathe a prayer after Bassett for a smooth way for his feet.

Yet the way of Bassett's feet was anything but smooth. Forty paces into the dark and just in a slight depression in the ground Casino's right leg shot out in a football trip. Bassett stumbled over it, half fell, recovered himself and swung a blind blow at Casino's head. His mittened fist took Casino behind the ear, but so far behind that the blow glanced off the tight-drawn parka hood.

The muscular impulse of the swing pivoted Tom around when his fist glanced and completed his fall. He collapsed face downward into the soft snow. Four of his five remaining stakes flew from his hand, and his ax slithered after them. This in itself approached calamity, but greater calamity smote him every moment.

As he attempted to scramble to his knees, the foremost of Casino's five friends bumped into him and sent him down again. And every time he repeated the rising operation, there came another man with a running shock to bowl him over. Each sprawling tumble he received thrust him deeper into the snow and farther from his stakes and handicapped him by so many precious minutes. Casino's gang had him marked, and try as he might he could not rise in the face of the rush.

He gave it up at last, let his fifth enemy go uncursed and resignedly allowed the three outsiders in the rear to overrun and trample him in their haste. Then he arose, white as a snow-man from the drifts, wasted more golden minutes locating his stakes and ax in the dark and raced up the boundary toward the corner.

So much had the others gained on him that there he staked alone. At the second corner he was also alone; but after he had driven his upper center-stake he caught and passed one of the outsiders just at the rise of the farther bank across the creek ice. As he crossed the ruddy belt of flame-light he saw other forms, up creek and down, darting on the same mission, and he had the satisfaction of knowing that he was not the only one delayed.

Along Montana's whole length the scene enacted on the claim he coveted was being repeated galore with but slight variations, like the many moving picture scenes upon a strip of film. Other men, scores of them, were being jostled, tripped, snow-christened, trodden upon and delayed in every conceivable manner, and from creek-mouth to creek-head the essay of relocation had resolved itself into one colossal carnival of racing, ramming and riotous recklessness.

Bassett drove his third corner-stake along with the second of the three outsiders, led him in the run for the fourth corner and along the line caught up with the third man. One tap apiece with the axes on that last corner and they flung the implements from them as they made for the creek again.

The third outsider made a grand sprint of it for a short distance, but he could not keep it up. For the claim was five hundred feet long and two thousand feet wide, lying like a double rectangle whose common base was the line of the creek. Thus he had run five thousand feet, almost a mile, around the boundaries, and now in the last few strides he cracked under the strain. Bassett breasted him, forged ahead and hurdled the creek bank onto the ice.

"Thunderation, Tom!" ejaculated Sark, swinging the dog team across to meet him. "I thought you were never coming. Casino's gone, and his five friends are gone. Did they smother you out?"

"They sure did," gasped Bassett, seizing the whip from his partner's hand and falling upon the sled. "I got a rough passage, all right, but the race ain't won yet. Go to it, you hoary-hided huskies! Mush!"

UNDER the urge of the whip the dogs surged into their breast bands and with Basset lying at full length and driving and Sark running at the rear on the tail rope, the outfit flashed down the creek. Behind them pealed clamorous voices, the howling of dogs, the pistol-like reports of the whips and the whinging shriek of sledge-runners. The claim race was finished. The river race was on. And Dawson City was the goal.

At the mouth of Montana a gigantic fire had been kindled. Its glare lit the snow for rods around, and in the glare stood the Gold Commissioner, bulking hugely in his furs, umpiring a fair start. There would doubtless be rough riding later on, but just now he was on the job, seeing that each outfit launched clear from the narrow gap of Montana's mouth into the wider course of Indian River.

"How many ahead, Fawcett?" asked Bassett, as they spun by in the red flare.

"Twenty teams," Fawcett called in their wake. "Casino's leading. But remember there are over three hundred men behind you."

"We won't forgit, for that's whar they have to stay!"

The rush was close on their heels because, on account of the lesser distance to travel, men had been more prone to take a chance even in the face of heavier odds upon the midway and lower claims of the creek. The stampede was driving down like a great wedge, thick at the head and petering out to single teams in the far upper reaches of Montana.

It was twenty-odd miles from Bassett's claim on Montana to the junction of Indian River and the Yukon, and eighteen more to Dawson itself, a continuous run of approximately forty miles. This distance was well within the sprinting powers of a good team of dogs, and it was not a race which could be won by hanging back, husbanding the huskies and drawing away in the stretch run.

There was no stretch run, or rather, it was all stretch run, a grueling drive from start to finish. The man who hung back only increased one hundredfold his chances of being jammed in the crush, and the more outfits he let go ahead of him the tighter he was bottled up.

So the motto of every contestant was: more room in front. With voice and whip they hastened to apply it, but the swiftest in application were Sark and Bassett. Their dogs were big, one hundred and forty pound Mackenzie River huskies, in prime condition and right on their mettle. It was fierce joy to the brutes to fly through the frosty atmosphere. The position of their drivers under the circumstances was not to be considered bad. Excepting Jess Tolume's claim for which no one was running, Bassett's was the fifteenth legal claim from the mouth. Given a fair showing in the staking, his position would have been even better, but the rough passage he got enabled twenty teams to lead him in the take-off.

Yet Tom, knowing the stamina of his animals, dared a sprint at the start. He unloosed a fierce lope that pulled down the teams ahead, and before they reached the mouths of McKinnon and Quartz Creeks, on opposite limits of Indian River, they had shown brushes to two racing outfits and were pushing three more to the limit of their speed.

From Quartz onward Bassett, whose wind had now come back, took his turn at the tail rope while Sark rested at full length upon the sled and drove. This work in the rear was exhausting. The pace was so fast that Tom was pounding along with gargantuan strides. Of course there were times when he hauled up on the tail rope and knelt on the rear of the sledge for a rest, but these were only moments of respite and recuperation, breaks in the steady grind that made a fresh renewal of the strenuous toil possible.

The creek mouths were milestones in their whizzing flight, signs for the partners to exchange places and spell each other. On under the play of the aurora and the blaze of the stars they sped, grim eyes focused on the teams ahead, and team by team they left them behind.

At Ruby Creek they passed another outfit; between Ruby and Ophir they led two more. On to Nine-mile Creek another pair succumbed. At Bertha Creek the number of spans ahead had been cut by desperate driving from thirteen to ten, and by the time they slewed out of the mouth of Indian River onto the Yukon, Tom and Eric had lopped off four more.

"Six ahead yet, Eric," calculated Bassett. "Casino and his five follerers. I've watched the ones we passed. They're exclusively outsiders. Casino and Company's all to the velvet yet."

"And going strong," returned Sark, from his kneeling position on the tail of the sled. "It's the early start they had."

"Sure, pardner. The reason of their bein' in the lead of the bunch of stakers from our claim down to the mouth kin be seen in their manner of stakin'. They concentrated. They disposed of my competition. The competition of the three outsiders wasn't fierce enough to count. So they jist ambled along in peace, and the six of 'em, unannoyed, staked as a single unanimous spirit. On the other fifteen claims below, things wasn't unanimous. Thar every man was competin' aginst every other man, fightin', holdin', delayin' and bein' delayed and lettin' Casino and Company steal the lead. But thar's two places races is won, Eric. They're won at the finish as well as at the start. They queered me at the start, so now's the time we got to do our darnedest to be in the competition at the end."

"Go to it, then. Six to one is still pretty big odds, but we can sure pare it down a little as we go."

But the paring down was no easy matter. Here on the Yukon the river's width was greater, and to the casual mind driving appeared all the easier. Yet such was not the case. One reason was that ice-jams predominated and constrained travel to well-defined routes. A second reason was that the stars and the aurora had paled, blanketing the land with a gloom which was the true herald of the coming dawn, and rendering fast journeying doubly dangerous. While a third reason obtained in the fact that the larger river space gave better opportunity for the jockeying which inevitably occurred in races of this kind, and which had not been indulged in on Indian River simply because to indulge in it would have been to court disaster and sled-wreck too early in the game.

It was for this last-named contingency that Sark and Bassett were especially on the look-out, as at the first subdued luminosity of day they drew up on the six leading sleds. Five of the sleds had but a single occupant. Casino, still in the van, had Gunboat Kane as his running-mate. In the conception of chechakos, in the rush a lone driver seemed to have the advantage, but old-timers knew better.

When trouble came, a running-mate to ward off collisions and help hail the dogs through ticklish spots was a great asset, far more than counterbalancing the handicap of his added weight upon the sledge at times. Also, a man erect on the tail-rope was in a superior position to observe the situation ahead than the driver lying down.

Sark held this position on the tail-rope as they inched up on the hindmost sled just at the mouth of Jim Creek on the right limit of the Yukon.

"Be careful if you pass, Tom," he warned. "There's an ice jam here."

THE hindmost sled was to the left of the jam and well clear of it. There was plenty of room to pass between, but the moment Bassett whipped his dogs into the passage, the other team veered sharply over.

"Look out! He'll wreck us!" yelled Eric.

Their sled was gliding at full speed, but Sark reached for the rocking runners of it and slewed the rear of it about. And even in the second of warning Bassett had vaulted off at the front with the haul-rope in his hand. He jerked the opposite way from Sark.

The sledge slithered sidewise around and flicked the huskies off their feet alongside the upper edge of the jam. By the barest fraction the abrupt stop saved them. The veering team bounced to one side of them, the evil lead-dog slashing Eric's leg in its course, and the outfit crashed into the sharp up-ended nose of the jam.

"That was a swift stunt, partner," laughed Sark, staring a second at the broken-backed sledge, the cursing driver and the battling dogs.

"The beggar git you deep?" asked Bassett, solicitously, as he straightened out his team again and felt if his bundle of dog-feed was safe.

He pointed to the blood which trickled down his comrade's moccasin onto the packed snow.

Sark put down his hand. His gauntlet came up dark-wet and warm.

"Not too deep," he grunted. "Go on! The odds are only five to one."

The other outfits had marked the fate of the one which tried to run Bassett's sled into the jam. They tried that trick no more, yet they uncovered one which appeared equally effective.

As Tom's string glided up, the two rearmost sledges bumped close on either side of him, their lead-dogs' noses even with his leader's, their wheel-dogs' brushes waving in a line with the brush of his wheeler.

"Sandwiched, Tom!" ejaculated Sark. "Watch your balance mighty careful and get out if you can."

Bassett whipped hard, but he could not shake the flanking outfits. They hung onto him grimly, so near that he could have touched them with a stretched arm, inching in and inching out with nerve-tensing feints and always steering him over the roughest spots in the river's surface.

In the corrugated reach in the middle of the Yukon where Ensley Creek had vomited forth mush ice at the time of the freeze-up, both sleds by mutual consent swerved violently into him. The shock of them, thrusting to a common center, counter-steadied each other, so that they suffered nothing but a swift outward slewing in recoil.

But with the partners' sled it was different. Caught on both quarters by the immense driving power of outfits which, dogs and all, weighed nearly half a ton apiece, their sled was catapulted straight up in the air. It came down on its side on the ice, but Sark and Bassett, hanging on to it, and twisting like cats while in the air, lit upon their moccasined feet and, running with the sled as the dogs dragged it along, quickly righted it again.

Sark kneeled as before on the tail of the sled, Bassett put his hand into the bound bundle on the front to see that his dog-feed was still in place and whipped after the offending outfits. Thrice more those outfits turned the trick between Ensley and Caribou Creeks. Thrice more the partners' sled bucked into air. Thrice more they flipped it upright again, and after every mishap Bassett felt for his dog-feed while dashing on.

"You're plumb solicitous about that feed, Tom," observed Sark, sitting on the sled while he bound a handkerchief around the gash in his leg which was spouting blood every time he landed on the ice.

"I am, pardner. I'm sure not goin' to lose it arter watchin' it this far. We'll mebbe need it before the end comes. But you better watch it and do the drivin'. I'm not goin' to lie here and see you spatterin' gore in the rear work. Here, take the whip!"

"No, Tom, stay where you are. I'm not the one who has to record. Savvy? If I do play out, you'll still be strong for the final spurt. You got to save yourself. But if you can save yourself and at the same time wriggle 'round those hindmost suckers, I'll be much obliged. They have the sandwich stunt down to a nicety."

"Yes," growled Bassett, "but I'll git 'em yet. Don't you worry. I've bin waitin'. I know a place whar I kin fix 'em."

The spot he had in mind was past Caribou Creek. There small rocky islands split the stream. The main-traveled trail lay by the east bank.

Bassett made a feint of boring in between his late opponents, then swerved abruptly and flew up the side channel behind the islands. A roar of warning from the two outfits greeted his move. He could hear them lashing their dogs to cut him off, but he too laced the MacKenzie River huskies to a frenzy.

The side channel was tortuous and rough, yet he gained a lead on the others in the main trail. Out of the foot of the passage he swerved his dogs in the arc of a circle. His whizzing sledge banged at an angle into the foremost of the other two. It rolled over and over, its dogs writhing a furry knot in the traces, and into it at full speed, and unable to stop, bolted the second outfit.

"Sandwich yourself, and see how you like it!" laughed Bassett, as they left the snarled heap behind and rocketed once more into the main-traveled trail.

"Good work, pardner, good work!" lauded Eric. "Our stock's ballooning up. The odds are three to one."

They had broken Casino's rear guard, and now they came to grips with Casino himself. But the latter was at no loss to meet the situation. Swiftly he made shrewd disposition of his forces. He, with Gunboat Kane on the tail of his sled, held the lead directly in front of Bassett's outfit. The two remaining teams he waved into position on the partners' flanks.

Thus were Tom and Eric pocketed as a good horse is pocketed in a race by rival jockeys. Drive fast or drive slow, they could not worm out. The three held them as in a vise, and whether they kept the main trail or deviated through the island channels, whether they forged straight on or corkscrewed about, chose smooth ice or roughed it out among the jams, Casino's sled with the other two stuck with them.

"This won't do, Tom," declared Sark in desperation. "We're getting on to Baker Creek. We got to go through. Give me the whip. You cut the gee-pole loose and drive with it."

QUICKLY Bassett slashed the gee-pole off. He knotted its binding-rope on for a lash and handed the twisted walrus-hide dog-whip to Eric. Balancing himself upon his knees and swinging the formidable weapon around his head, Eric brought it down upon the pocketing outfits. Nor were they slow to retaliate. Directing their dogs by voice, aided by an occasional blow, the two men on either side of him thrashed viciously at him, and ahead, on the tail of Casino's sled and possessed of Casino's whip, Gunboat Kane kicked the lead-dog in the nose to hold him down the while he landed thirty-foot flicks of his lash around Sark's head and shoulders.

It was a wild moment, with the turmoil of the four boring outfits, the shriek of the gritting sled-runners, the howls of the punished dogs, the imprecations of the battling men and the *splat-splat-splat* of the whip-lashes on parka-clad bodies, all transpiring in reckless, meteor-like flight. A wild moment and a bitter, brutal moment, a moment to break a man's spirit under odds and lose him the race.

Yet Sark fought madly back at the three, inflicting much punishment and receiving more, and every successive moment he stood the strain he allowed Bassett to push his dogs up closer and closer upon Casino's leading outfit. So close he pushed them that the lead-dog got his nose over the tail of the sled and sank his fangs in sweet revenge in Gunboat's calves. Gunboat had to scramble back and sit upon his calves and turn all his fighting power against the enraged beast.

The seams of the pocket began to gape. The two flanking sleds crowded in to hold the partners safe, their runners grinding against those of the partners' sled and the whip-butts of the drivers taking the place of the whip-lashes at such short range.

It was the crisis for which Sark and Bassett were watching.

"Now, the runner trick, pardner!" whispered Eric. "And heave with every muscle!"

Taking unreturned two vicious blows apiece squarely upon their parka hoods, they leaned out on either side of their bouncing outfits. Their hands gripped the upright supports of their antagonists' sled-runners. They heaved upward with one tremendous heave, and both outfits heeled high on one runner, quivered there an instant and capsized with a crash.

"Even money!" gloated Sark, wiping away the smear of crimson from his eyes. "Here's your whip, Tom, and yonder's the mouth of Swede Creek. Go blood-leathering to it!"

There was no outside support left Casino. No cunning or subterfuge of numbers availed him now. Man to man and dog to dog it was straight and open racing. The Yukon was wide at Swede Creek, and Bassett had plenty of opportunity to swing well clear of Casino's sled. He gave himself lots of leeway, off to Casino's left, and then put on his spurt. Casino likewise laid on the walrus-hide to maintain his short lead, and Gunboat Kane, still on the tail of the sled, crouched low to keep his weight well down on the ice and make it easier for the dogs.

"Wonder Gunboat doesn't drop off!" yelled Sark through the whistling wind-current of their flight.

"Yep," screamed his partner. "Looks like as if they had another set of ivories in their dice-box. Don't you drop off till he does. He's lookin' ugly and I wouldn't be surprised to see him pull a gun. Watch him keen, pardner. And jist cast an eye to the rear!"

Sark got to his knees, sighted up-river and quickly flopped down again.

"They're coming!" he gritted. "The rest of the stampede in a solid swarm. And, Tom, remember there are three more in it with options on our claim."

The cracking of Bassett's whip redoubled. His lead-dog's nose crept past the tail of Casino's sled and up, up, inch by inch, to its front. Now his leader paralleled Casino's wheeler, Casino's fourth dog, third dog, second dog, and finally Casino's leader.

Thus the two teams hung for nearly a mile, fighting it out every foot of the way, straining to the utmost of their super-beasts' natures under the furious urge of voice and lash. They ran low to the river surface, stretching their very joints in the marvelous lope of their savage forebears, their flanks raw-red from the flaying whip, their hoar-rimed fur steaming in a cloud, their breaths puffing like smoke-jets, and bloody slaver streaking from their jaws.

Slowly, in an endeavor that was agony for his team, Bassett began to pull ahead. Even as dog by dog Tom had drawn up on Casino, now dog by dog he began to drop him behind. The tail of his sled cleared the nose of Casino's leader and painfully opened out a gap.

"We win!" shrieked Sark, shaking his gantleted fist at the frantically slashing Casino. "You hear, you shark-faced son of an ancient Pharisee? We win!"

But even in the midst of Sark's exultation disappointment's buffet smote him. Straight ahead and only a little distance from the bluff at the Klondike River's mouth he glimpsed Ante Baker rushing out from shore with a string of five fresh dogs.

"A relay!" he snarled. "Consarn his coat of seven colors and his heart of seventy wiles!"

"I was afraid of it all along," spoke Bassett. "Eric, I was afraid it was to stage a relay and not to record by proxy that Ante broke for Dawson."

* * *

TOM flailed the last inch of leather into the huskies, and they responded with their last ounce of strength. It was apparently Sark's and Bassett's only chance to gain a lead, while Casino exchanged dogs, and hold it if possible in the face of his certain lightning - finish. But they did not get such a lead as was to be expected.

Casino made no ordinary stop to exchange. While still in full flight he cut the haul-rope which fastened the traces. The released dogs, shooting forward with astounding impetus, swerved bewildered, performed a dizzy stagger and fell exhausted on the ice. The sled still shot on, and before it had slowed to a halt, Ante Baker, haling his string of fresh animals along by hand, swung them in ahead of it and fastened up the traces on the run. It was beautiful work, a new team galloping where the old had been, done in the flicker of an eye like the shift of a sleight-of-hand artist, and though it spelled defeat for him, Sark could not help but admire the dexterity of the exploit.

"Tom, they're sure old-timers, all!" he breathed, as his partner hurled his team by the bluff onto the rubble of rough ice which stretched across the Klondike's mouth clear from Klondike City to Dawson itself, half a mile north on the other bank. "No matter how hard we crowd them, they always have a side-step left. It's up to Fate and you. I'll drop off here and lighten you that much."

But to Eric's astonishment Tom vigorously demurred.

"Don't you do it!" he commanded. "I want you with me. Mebbe we kin fight 'em off. Your weight don't make a smatter of difference to this team. If they kin't win with you, they sure kin't win without you. Here, crawl up and drive. The huskies is used to me now. A new voice sometimes works wonders."

At Sark's call the MacKenzie Rivers, though ostensibly on their last legs, bucked up and let out another link. Yet Bassett, looking back, saw that Casino's fresh team now in full stride was rapidly overhauling them. Behind Casino, Tom glimpsed the main body of the stampede, sweeping in solid array, leathering demoniacally for the finish.

It was the middle of the forenoon. Full day bathed the river and etched out the mountained shores and the forests of spruce phalanxed upon the mountains. The gut of the writhing waterway was crammed with rocking outfits. In a weird throng they poured along, over three hundred men in parkas, mackinaws and furs, white as ghosts with their frozen sweat, mushing singly or in pairs, and flaying like unbridled maniacs their flagging dogs.

The thunder of the sleds upon the river ice reverberated in a hollow booming. The cracking whips rattled like artillery. Here a sled jammed. There a man stumbled. Yonder a string of played dogs slipped down. Yet nothing stayed the onpour. It flowed forward, an irresistible sea, and those who were swamped in its front and trampled upon came up out of its devious undertow at the back and pressed grimly on to override others as unfortunate as themselves. A vast barbaric army, it charged, intent upon a single goal, and the delay caused by the leaders' sled-jockeying all the way down from Indian River, by the whip battle and by Casino's exchange of teams had permitted it to gain up and get right in the running for that goal.

The partners' outfit was half-way across the mouth of the Klondike River. There was only a quarter of a mile to go, and Tom and Eric could see a huge crowd, gathered no doubt at Ante Baker's news of the coming stampede, blackening the river-bank. Also, they could hear the crowd and knew that the crowd's sympathies were with them. The mob was gesticulating frantically and yelling for them to win. But Sark, glancing over his shoulder, saw Casino's team only forty yards away and overtaking his bushed animals as if they were frozen in the ice.

"We lose, Tom; we lose!" he groaned. "It isn't in this dog-flesh to do it."

"Then mebbe it's in the dog-feed!" returned Bassett. "Gimme that mackinaw bundle."

"What for, you idiot? You can't feed our team going like this."

"I don't wanta feed our team. Gimme the bundle, lightnin' quick, and don't pinch it too hard."

"Tom, their team?" gasped Sark intuitively. He broke the cords and shoved over the bundle which squirmed in his hands. "And alive? But what in thunder is it?"

"Rabbit's feet—for luck!" chuckled Bassett. "Only the rabbit's on the feet!"

He stripped away the mackinaw which had been converted into a bag, and held up by the ears a spotless snowshoe rabbit.

"I knowed that greedy geezer of a Casino would have a relay under his medulla oblongata," Tom grinned. "But here's somethin' as beats a relay. It wasn't the geepole I was chasin' so long in the forest, Eric. It was this joker here. The scrub's lousy with 'em thar, and that's whar the Montana Creek squaws has their snares set. I got him in the snares. They was full of dead ones, but it took me some time to spot one that wasn't strangled."

Bassett leaned outward as he spoke and planked the snowshoe rabbit down in front of Casino's speeding team. Casino's fresh lead-dog snapped at it, but the rabbit leaped aside. Every dog in the team snapped as he ran, missed, and wheeled sharply back for the chase. Cursing furiously, Casino tried to stop the swerve with his whip, but the sled was already whirled broadside on and directly in the path of the rushing forefront of the main stampede.

Those in front had no chance to halt or turn out. They were tearing too close behind.

Their sleds collided violently with Casino's and upset, and before they could make a move, the irresistible sea behind rolled into them. Wave upon wave, with the swiftness of combers dashing on a windy beach, the human and beastly jam piled up in a chaotic flotsam. The snowy breast of the Yukon might have been the foam on shoal and treacherous water and these shipwrecked hordes cast up all tangled with loops of leather, snarls of rope and bits of twisted wood and metal. All along the river-bank below the foot of Main Street were they strewn, and far out to midstream, and they heaved and rose and fell as upon a moving tide.

All the excitement and strain of the race was transmuted into vicious anger at disaster. Like the undertone of the sea rumbled the clamor of their shouts and angry struggles, and sheer through the litter of prone, wrestling bodies one thousand masterless dogs pursued their untrammeled hunt.

In the bottom of the hunt lay Casino, the snowshoe rabbit which had foredoomed him to defeat right under his nose. But Bassett, the wily and triumphant Bassett, was blocks up Main Street kicking at the recording-office door.

THE LETTER OF THE PROMISE

by M. S. WIGHTMAN

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MAJOR CUTTER, Philippines Constabulary, who commanded the forces in Bulayan, with headquarters at Porto Oporto, sat at his desk in the rambling old building of Spanish architecture in which the Constabulary had its offices. He had only that moment concluded the reading of a letter which the fortnightly mail had brought from Manila; it was from the General and said that Mullen would get the vacant lieutenant-colonelcy.

But in spite of this disappointing message, the letter was couched in flattering terms, commending his work and rather plainly hinting that the next vacancy would go to him—a letter which many a major would have given a month's pay to receive. And yet Cutter's hand trembled so that the paper crackled slightly, and his scowling brows were drawn together into a straight black line.

"It's Bradley," he said at length, bringing his foot down with a vicious stamp upon the floor.

And he was right; it was Bradley, the

Colonel who commanded the Eighth District, the district to which Bulayan was attached. Colonel Bradley had never lost his head over Major Cutter's brilliant record; instead, for some reason which he could never explain to himself, he distrusted this tall, dark, self-controlled man; and he had persuaded the general to give the vacant place to the ranking major.

"Cutter has had recognition enough; he can afford to wait. In four years he has gone up from a second-lieutenancy to his majority, and promoting men out of their turn always creates hard feeling," the colonel had argued.

Then after a speculative look at the end of his cigar, he had added:

"Besides, Cutter has had things altogether too much his way so far. I should like to see how he would stand up under disappointment."

So the other man got the place; and to judge from his looks Cutter's rage was entirely incommensurate with what he considered the rebuff. To understand it, you would have to know—what no one in the Philippines suspected—that for weeks he had been tottering on the verge of a mine which threatened at any moment to explode, wrecking his career.

He had joined the service in the early days when the need for officers was so great that their pasts were not minutely inquired into; and Cutter had a past, an unenviable one, which included a wife whom he had abandoned in San Francisco. That she was worthless and had helped drag him down did not palliate the fact that she was legally married to him; and when he came to the Philippines with the determination to start afresh, he made the mistake of ignoring her.

The result had been inevitable. She had finally learned of his whereabouts and his success. For months he had been paying blackmail to a firm of Pacific Coast shyster lawyers, and at last they had drained him dry. With the extra pay of a lieutenant-colonel he might have held out for some-time longer; but now he was finished.

They would hound him out of the service.

It did not occur to him to go to Manila, confess his past to the general and beg assistance in straightening out the tangle. At heart he was bad, his dominant vanity had never been broken; his failure to receive the promotion which he felt that he had earned, only confirmed him in the belief that the world was leagued against him, a belief which had governed his actions in the former crises of his career.

With a gesture of rage, he tore up the letter and damned the Constabulary as a hotbed of favoritism.

Then his glance, wandering about the room, fell on the clumsy old iron safe in which Lieutenant Pendelton, supply officer at Porto Oporto, kept his funds. With an involuntary impulse, he crossed to it, tried the door and found it locked.

Then he stood looking speculatively at the safe. He knew that it contained an unusually large sum of money—something more than twelve thousand pesos, part of it a relief fund for some sufferers from a recent typhoon. And into his face, as he stood gazing at the safe, there came the look of a wolf gazing from a hilltop at a wire-enclosed corral in the valley below.

* * *

"I'VE got Ricardo out here; caught him red-handed smuggling opium. We have the goods on him all right. Perhaps after a bit of grilling you can find out something about the rest of his gang."

It was Pendelton, who had entered unobserved.

Cutter turned unhurriedly, and let his glance rest on the supply officer. Pendelton was young, the youngest first lieutenant in the service. Despite the erectness with which he carried himself, his slender figure and smooth, unlined face gave him the look of a boy rather than a man, and a certain eagerness and impulsiveness of manner added to the impression.

He was a Southerner, easily moved, and with a somewhat exaggerated and quixotic regard for what he called the code of a gentleman. He would not tell a lie and he made a fetish of keeping his word. For the Major he felt the intense loyalty and admiration of a boy for an older and successful man with whom he is thrown.

Now under Cutter's gaze he flushed slightly.

"Did I disturb—" he began.

Cutter caught himself and laughed.

"I was only thinking of something, Pen," he said. "You have Ricardo out there? Bring him in."

He returned to his desk and sat down. In his face there was no hint of anger or emotion.

Ricardo shuffled in, a small, brown,

wizened old man, wearing a Moro turban wound round his head. His mouth was open in a friendly grin, disclosing two rows of blackened stumps, and from the cloth about his waist there protruded the handle of a Malay *kris*. To the last silver ornament on his shirt, he looked the renegade old pirate that he was.

"And so you have been up to your old tricks, have you, Ricardo?" said Cutter.

Ricardo did not reply, but his grin widened ingratiatingly.

Suddenly Cutter started slightly and drummed for a moment on the top of his desk, then he turned to Pendelton.

"Let me talk to him for awhile alone," he said in an undertone. "I have an idea I may be able to get something out of him."

"RIDGWAY tells me you did not lock Ricardo up."

They were at luncheon later in the day, and Pendelton had spoken to the major.

With his knife, Cutter carefully dug the bones from a piece of fish impaled on his fork.

"No," he said casually. "He won't run away. I have a sergeant keeping an eye on him. He has promised to help me round up some of his crowd. Why will Juan persist in getting fish that's all bones?"

Pendelton did not pursue the subject; the responsibility was not his. Yet he would have staked his best revolver against a five-centavo piece that the Moro would give them the slip. It seemed strange that Cutter should not know it.

Two mornings later, the sergeant reported that Ricardo had disappeared during the night, taking with him five of his henchmen.

Cutter glanced at Pendelton, who had been present during the report. Then he turned furiously on the native and in a voice blazing with anger berated him for allowing the old smuggler to escape.

Never before had Pendelton heard the older man give way to his unbridled anger; but the outburst left him cold. The escape was not the sergeant's fault. He felt a sudden sympathy for the man who cringed under the lashing of the major's tongue. And then he found himself wondering whether Cutter's anger were real; somehow it did not seem so.

At last, with a violent gesture, the major dismissed the man and, stepping back to his desk, dropped into a chair.

"I am sick of the whole business," he said with a shrug, as he lit a cigarette and blew the smoke violently from his lungs. "It's slave away year in, year out, with a bunch of incompetents, and at the beck and call of a lot of coffee-coolers in Manila. And where does it get you? Nowhere. You do the work, and somebody else gets the credit. Red-tape, favoritism, living in a hole like this—it's a dog's life. I want something big, something free, some place where a man can get what he earns without kowtowing to a lot of stuffed uniforms. And I'll get it too. I have a plan——"

He checked himself, and dropped into a more casual tone.

"I'll tell you about it one of these nights. You are in on it, Pen. You are entirely too good to waste your life at this."

Pendelton was embarrassed. Cutter had suddenly revealed a new side to his character, a side which the boy could not understand. He wondered whether the major might not be working too hard.

And for the next few days the sense of embarrassment increased. Cutter singled him out for his attentions, seemed to take it for granted that there was something, a secret, a common interest, which vaguely set them apart from the other officers. Once or twice he sought the younger man's advice on small routine matters; and several times Pendelton came upon him with his chin sunk down, gazing before him with a look of intense absorption.

At last on a star-lit night, a week after Ricardo's escape, Cutter took him down to the beach and unfolded to him the plan of which he had spoken. It had to do with getting control of the Island of Pucao which, he said, lay a couple of hundred miles west of Borneo, contained one of the richest gold-mines in Asia, and was governed by a rum-drinking old sultan who had somehow managed to maintain his independence.

Cutter's plan was secretly to load the Government's launch with arms, start ostensibly on an inspection trip down the coast, continue to Borneo, and in one of its out-of-the-way harbors recruit a score of fighting-men. With these men they would go to Pucao, and, by moral suasion backed by a show of force, get control of the sultan.

"Will you go?" he asked when he had

finished his minute outline of what they were to do.

Pendelton laughed, waiting for the joke to be explained to him. "Certainly. When do we start?"

Cutter did not join in the laugh. Instead he replied in an even tone:

"I'll let you know."

And as they turned to walk back to their quarters, he added casually:

"Of course we will take that money of yours with us."

Pendelton stopped short, and the laugh died out of his face also.

"You don't mean the money in the safe?"

"Yes," said Cutter, "that is just what I do mean. The whole thing depends on that."

Pendelton shook his head.

"Well, if my going depends on taking the money, you will have to leave me out." He shot a curious look at the older man. "But of course you are only joking. You wouldn't steal?"

At the word Cutter winced, but he turned a cool, unhurried glance on the boy.

"Do I look as if I were joking?" he asked.

Pendelton did look at him, and for the first time he saw that the man was in earnest. A sensation of repugnance tinged with fear passed over him. Had Cutter suddenly gone mad? Without replying, he drew a step backward.

After a moment's pause, Cutter continued in that same level tone:

"What is the matter? You agreed right enough a moment ago. Don't tell me you haven't the sand to see a thing through properly if you undertake it. It won't be stealing. We'll only borrow the money if you like; pay it back when we get control in Pucao. Are you afraid of Bilibid?"

Pendelton dug the sand nervously with the toe of his shoe.

"Maybe we see things differently," he said. "To me it would be stealing, so of course, I couldn't do it. Perhaps it's fear of Bilibid—but I don't think so. You see," there was a tone of boyish pride in his voice, robbing the words of their histrionics, "I never heard of a Pendelton who did anything to be ashamed of. I shouldn't like to be the first."

Cutter laughed.

"All right—you are the doctor," he said, and walked up the beach alone.

Pendelton instinctively felt in his pocket for the key to his safe. Its touch reassured him. Then he sat down on the sand and crossing his hands behind his head tried to puzzle out the meaning of the scene he had just taken part in.

That Cutter had been joking he put aside. There remained then but one explanation: he had suddenly become unbalanced from overwork. But somehow this explanation did not satisfy him. In spite of the wildness of the scheme there had been nothing irrational in Cutter's manner or speech; he had not really tried to persuade him to go; instead, he seemed only to be playing a part, and back of it there was something; the man seemed to have anticipated his refusal, to have taken it as a matter of course.

Then why had he suggested the theft? Pendelton could not determine; but he felt again that sensation of fear, of a vague, mysterious danger which threatened him. Something in Cutter's manner had given him the feeling.

When Pendelton finally returned to his room, he found Cutter deep in an easy chair, turning the pages of a magazine. At the younger man's entrance he looked up.

"I hope you didn't take seriously all that flubdub I gave you back there," he said with a laugh.

"Of course not," said Pendelton, trying to put into his voice a cheerfulness which he did not feel. "I knew you were only joking."

The major rose.

"And I am afraid it was a rather stupid, clumsy joke. I was only trying to get your goat. Come on, let's have a drink and forget it."

He went out into the hall, called to a *muchacho* to bring whisky and soda; and when the boy had brought the glasses, took them from him and reentered the room.

"How!" he grunted.

"How!" echoed Pendelton, lifting the glass he had been given.

And five minutes later he sank down inertly in his chair.

PENDELTON awoke late the next morning with that same sensation of impending danger, that same feeling of mysterious fear. The key to the safe was in his pocket; but he slipped quickly into his clothes. He wanted to see that the funds were safe.

Bareheaded he hurried to the office and opened his safe. The money was in small canvas sacks, ten of them, with the amount which each contained marked on a tag fixed to the cord with which the sack was tied. He counted them; there were now only nine. And when he had emptied each and checked its contents, he found that the missing sack had contained a thousand pesos.

A sudden blackness engulfed his mind, blotting out the sight of the piles of bills and silver. But after a moment it passed, giving way to a furious anger.

Cutter was a thief! He had always intended to steal the money; this had been the mysterious threat which he had felt, but could not understand. Now that he knew what it was, he no longer felt afraid. If necessary he would take Cutter by the throat and force him to disgorge.

He found the major with two other officers on his morning's inspection of the barracks.

"May I speak to you a moment in private?" he asked, trying to keep his voice steady.

There was no trace of embarrassment in Cutter's manner,

"Certainly," he said easily, detaching himself from the group. "What is it?"

Without replying, Pendelton led the way to the beach where the night before Cutter had unfolded his plan. Then he whirled on the older man.

"I want that thousand pesos!" he said.

Cutter faced him coolly.

"Did you bring me out here to talk nonsense?" he asked.

For a moment Pendelton glared at the other's insolent face. Then, choking with rage, he hurled himself upon him. Cutter seized him by the arms.

"You fool! Do you want me to have you locked up?" he asked in a voice sharp enough to cut through the boy's anger.

Pendelton struggled in vain to free himself; and suddenly, as if realizing the futility of his efforts, he caught himself and stood still. Then the Major dropped his hold.

"And now," he said, "tell me what it is all about."

"I don't think that is necessary," answered Pendelton. "You know that a thousand pesos were stolen from my safe last night, and—" his anger blazing out again—"by——! They are going to be put back this morning!"

"Yes?" inquired Cutter. "By whom?"

"By you!" Pendelton's tone was menacing.

Cutter laughed.

"Very likely! I see myself giving you a thousand pesos to replace money which you yourself must have taken. For if, as you say, they are gone, you must have gotten them! No one else could have. You have the key and you have a guard over the money. What did the guard say, by the way? Did he report any attempt to get at the safe?"

Pendelton did not answer. He had not examined the guard, but from Cutter's manner he knew it would be useless. In some way he must have passed the sentry unobserved; perhaps he had found him asleep, or entered through one of the rear windows which he had left open for the purpose. And for the first time he realized that Cutter intended to charge him with the theft.

He paced the sands nervously for a moment. Then he halted in front of the older man.

"If you don't return it I'll kill you, so sure as there's a God in heaven!"

Cutter smiled imperturbably.

"All right, if you want to swing instead of spending about ten years in Bilibid, kill me. And to be frank, I shouldn't care very much. I'm sick of things. Pot me if you like. That would certainly cover your name with a blaze of glory—a murderer as well as a thief."

Pendelton stared at his tormentor incredulously. Then he cleared his throat huskily.

"Well, what are you proposing to do?" he asked.

The major's manner changed; he dropped his role of indifference for one of friendliness.

"Ah, that's more like it! Now we are down to brass tacks, and can talk sensibly. You say you are a thousand pesos short—never mind how. I think I could dig up that amount somewhere, and I might be willing to—on conditions—as a contribution toward that expedition we were discussing last night, for example. I confess I should hate to see you in Bilibid.

"And by the way, I hope you won't feel called upon to report your shortage to me officially. If you do I shall have to investigate it, and, from what you have told me, I suspect it would result in your arrest on a charge of theft. No—"he raised his hand admonishingly, as Pendelton started to speak—"there is no hurry. Take time to think it over."

He started to return up the beach; but after a few steps he paused and called over his shoulder:

"I forgot to mention it, but you will find something on your desk which might interest you."

THE "something" proved to be a telegram, signed by Colonel Bradley, saying that he would arrive in Porto Oporto on a trip of inspection the following day. To Pendelton it was an ultimatum; he had twenty-four hours to determine whether he would suffer the fate of a thief or actually become one. Those seemed to be the alternatives.

He sat staring at that slip of brown paper, while little beads of perspiration merged into rivulets and trickled their way unnoticed down his forehead. He, Rutledge Pendelton, would be branded as a thief; and the news would get back home. Success ten thousand miles away might escape notice—but not disgrace.

He thought of his brother John, staid old John, who had taken up the burden of the family where his father dropped it, and by self-denial and patient work sent him through college. This would be John's reward, that the younger brother, he who had always been the family pet, for whom the way had always been made easy, who had found the confines of home too narrow but must embark on a career of adventure, leaving John to do the grinding, should be proved a thief.

Slowly Pendelton's look of boyishness began to give way to one of grim determination. Cutter might have him cornered, but he would not give up without a fight. There must be some way out, if he could only find it.

For the first time he tried dispassionately to analyze his situation. Cutter had tried to dazzle him with the vision of an island empire. He had never heard of Pucao. Probably there was no such place; the grandiose scheme had been simply a cloak to hide the sordidness of the theft.

He realized that he was necessary to Cutter's plan. Together they could leave openly without exciting suspicion. It would be days, it might be weeks, before the theft was discovered; time enough for them to hide their tracks completely. But without his connivance Cutter was helpless. He could not get away with the money.

So much was clear. He saw why Cutter had first tried to persuade him to go, and when he refused, had tried to force his aid by stealing a part of the money.

But, he asked himself, why only a part? Why had the major not taken it all when once he had made up his mind to robbery? For a time the question puzzled him, as he began to draw circles on a blank sheet of paper before him.

Suddenly he saw it. Cutter had taken only a thousand pesos, because no one would doubt that Pendelton had stolen it, helping himself from time to time to the funds under his control. Even in Porto Oporto a man could squander that amount without attracting notice, even a man whose record was as clean in the matter of wine and women as Pendelton's. It left him no defense; no one would inquire how he had spent it; and to accuse Cutter would only be to alienate sympathy. The truth would be considered absurd.

With a shock he realized the man's ingenuity. He intended to brand him as the most contemptible of rogues, a common, petty thief, who had weakly yielded to slight temptation. And he did not doubt that Cutter would do it. He recalled the man as he had stood revealed in those two scenes. No doubt he needed money urgently, to be driven to such extremes to get it; he would take the twelve thousand pesos if he could drive Pendelton into helping him; if not, he would keep the one he had already stolen, and let the younger man pay the penalty. That much was clear.

And he could not find that way out. The problem baffled him; Cutter could not be forced, but was there not a way in which he might be outwitted?

Finally Pendelton rose. His face was set with determination. He had twenty-four hours; he would take Cutter's advice and use them. And meanwhile he would maintain a bold front; he could at least do that.

He went to his quarters for breakfast; and when he had finished, he resolutely set himself to carry through his day's duties.

THE next morning when Pendelton, hollow-eyed from loss of sleep, and tense with the strain of keeping himself in hand, went to his office, Cutter followed him and closed the door.

"Well," he said, "the *Rover* will be here in a few hours now. Which is it to be?"

Pendelton faced him steadily. His eyes were unnaturally brilliant; but otherwise he gave no sign of emotion.

"I'll go with you," he said wearily. "There seems to be no other way."

"Spoken like a man, Pen," said Cutter heartily. "I knew you would see things in the right light. We will return the money in due time and nobody will be hurt. And you see how I trust you. Here I am giving you a thousand pesos, and I sha'n't ask for a scrap of paper or anything else to show for it.

"You could tell the whole thing to Bradley when he comes to-day. Of course he wouldn't believe you; he would think you had gone crazy; but he would probably relieve you and I should lose my money. All I want is your word, on the honor of a Pendelton, that you will say nothing about it and that you'll go when I say so."

The young man laughed mirthlessly. "The honor of a Pendelton!" It sounded like old-fashioned melodrama; but he realized that Cutter had judged him rightly, for if he gave his word, he knew that, cost what it would, he would keep it.

"All right," he said slowly. "I promise that I'll say nothing about it, and that I'll go."

"Helping me take the money in the safe," added Cutter.

"Helping you to take what's in the safe," repeated Pendelton.

Cutter left the room, to return presently, bearing under his arm a carefully wrapped package, which he dropped on the desk.

"Here you are, Pen," he said. "I scraped around among my possessions until I made up the thousand. You might count them."

Pendelton clutched the package eagerly. It was a respite at any rate. But his voice was level as he answered:

"I'll take your word, but if you don't mind you might cut out the 'Pen.' I have promised to go because I don't see any other way out. But don't make any mistake that I am a friend of yours. I am not, and I warn you fair enough that I'll balk you if I can without breaking my word."

Cutter flushed.

"Just try it, Mr. Pendelton!" he said.

That morning Pendelton wrote two letters. One was addressed to his brother John, telling him simply that he was in trouble, and begging him to believe that whatever happened he would try to carry out his duty as he saw it. The other was addressed to Colonel Bradley. The letter to his brother he dropped into the post-office; the other he placed carefully in his pocket.

"WHAT is the matter, Lieutenant? A touch of fever?"

Colonel Bradley was speaking, on the deck of the *Rover*, which had entered, an hour later, and dropped anchor in the bay. He was a tall, thin man, with a large mouth and a genial expression, which an icy glint in his eyes occasionally belied. Few things escaped his notice; he prided himself on his powers of deduction; he said that an inspector was concerned more with the spirit than with mere bald facts and appearences, and as an inspector he had been a conspicuous success.

He had noticed at once that Pendelton's face, which he had remembered for its boyishness, was gaunt, that there were hollows under his eyes, and a tenseness in his manner, as if he were, with an effort, consciously holding himself in hand.

And Pendelton's start, at the abrupt question, did not escape the colonel.

"No, sir," he said, "only a little insomnia. I haven't been able to sleep much these last few nights—maybe it's the heat."

Colonel Bradley did not just then pursue the subject further; but on the launch he from time to time shot an unobtrusive glance at the supply officer.

"Insomnia? yes," he said to himself, as they stepped ashore. "But I want to know what is causing it."

He could discover no reason, however, during his inspection that day. From a casual examination, Pendelton's accounts appeared to be in order, the funds under his control correct. But more and more, he had that impression that the boy was on his guard, and that in his attitude toward Cutter there was a vague stiffness, almost a sense of hostility. Also he noticed that not once, not even when they were counting the money in Pendelton's safe, did the major leave him alone with the supply officer.

"You are dining with us this evening, I hope, Colonel?" said Cutter, when at nightfall they had returned to headquarters from a visit to the Presidente.

Colonel Bradley looked up. Pendelton

was emerging from the building to join them; and at the sight of him an idea suddenly flashed into the colonel's mind. He would take Pendelton alone with him to the ship; perhaps in the intimacy of the table, he could learn what was causing the boy's insomnia.

"No," he said, "I have some reports which I must finish tonight. Thank you just the same." Then he turned to Pendelton. "And I am going to take you out with me, Lieutenant. I want your ideas on my new accounting system. The launch can wait for you; I promise to send you ashore early."

As the boy accepted, the colonel, for the first time that day, caught a sign of uneasiness in Cutter's manner. He offered no objection to Pendelton's going; but he accompanied them to the wharf, as if almost to force an invitation for himself.

The invitation was not forthcoming, however; but until the gloom had swallowed up the sight of the shore, Colonel Bradley saw that the major was standing where they had left him, following the launch with his eyes.

An hour later, after a capital dinner on the deck of the *Rover*, a dinner mellowed by the attentions of a China boy in immaculate white drill, whose one purpose in life seemed to be that of preventing the diners from ever coming to the bottom of their glasses, the colonel pushed back his chair and lighted a cigar.

He was in a cheerful mood. He had set himself to break through Pendelton's reserve, and he had succeeded. For the last half-hour the younger man had been chatting freely and naturally on his life at Porto Oporto.

After a momentary pause while he drew slowly on his cigar, the colonel leaned forward, with his elbows on the table, and said in a quiet voice:

"And now tell me what it is."

Pendelton drew back as if to seek refuge in the shadows outside the circle of light at the table, and the colonel felt the reserve flash back into his manner.

"What do you mean, sir?" he asked.

"I suspect you know better than I," the colonel remarked, and then paused; but Pendelton vouchsafing no reply, he continued:

"You have something on your mind, something which is on the verge of sending you a mile high into the air. I want to know what it is. To be exact, what is keeping you from sleeping at night?"

Pendelton cleared his throat.

"I—perhaps—it's been very hot and muggy down here lately, sir."

The colonel ignored the evasion.

"If you think I am impertinent, remember, Lieutenant Pendelton, you have in your charge a large sum of government money. Supply officers must not get on edge. They must be able to sleep at night."

"Yes, sir," said Pendelton in a strained voice, "I realize that."

"Well, then, what is it?"

Again Pendelton was silent; and suddenly the colonel burst out impatiently:

"Haven't you got a tongue, boy? Can't you see I am trying to help you?"

Pendelton bit his lip in his effort to control his feeling. He wanted desperately to tell the whole story to the colonel. And why not? Something told him that the colonel would believe him.

He pushed back his chair, walked to the rail and for a moment stood looking out into the night. Then he returned, and dropped into his chair.

"I am afraid there is nothing you can help, colonel," he said.

"Have you had trouble with Major Cutter?"

The younger man's face hardened.

"You will have to ask Major Cutter about that, sir," he said, a note of passion for the first time creeping into his voice.

Colonel Bradley drew slowly on his cigar, as beneath lowered lids he studied Pendelton with appraising eyes. He felt a sudden warm liking for the boy. He had spirit and he had character. In spite of his uncommunicativeness, there was something clean and straightforward about him.

"Pendelton—" he began, and stopped abruptly.

Over the lieutenant's shoulder he saw a ruddy glare suddenly break the darkness of the shore.

With an exclamation, he leaped to his feet and ran to the rail. A bamboo shack in the native barrio was enveloped in flames, and in the brisk wind the sparks were whirling above the roofs of those adjoining it. Silhouetted by the light of the flames dark figures were running aimlessly about, gesticulating frantically with their hands. Suddenly he saw Cutter emerge into the light and push his way through the rapidly growing throng.

"Quick, the launch, Mr. Byrd!" he shouted to the second-officer, who had appeared on deck; and, followed by Pendelton, he hurried to the gangway.

THE fire had spread, threatening the entire barrio, by the time Colonel Bradley reached the scene; and Cutter and his men were trying to check it by pulling down the shacks in its path.

An hour later Colonel Bradley mopped his brow, as he stood with the major, gazing somewhat ruefully at the swath cut by the flames.

"Hot work!" he exclaimed with an expulsion of breath.

Then he looked about for Pendelton, whom he had a vague impression he had not seen at all during the fire. He was not now in sight.

As they started up the street together, he turned to Cutter.

"What was the trouble between you and Pendelton?" he asked.

The major met his gaze unflinchingly.

"What did he say?" he countered.

"He didn't say a thing. He wouldn't even admit that there had been any trouble, but I take it there was."

Cutter smiled indulgently.

"Nothing much," he said, "Pendelton was a little careless, a little too familiar in his manner with the men, and I had to jack him up for it. He is oversensitive. You know these Southerners. I think that for a day or two it galled his pride. But he is all right now."

"I hope so," said the Colonel. "I like that boy. He's got good stuff in him—he's clean through and through."

"They don't make them any better," agreed Cutter heartily.

As they turned into the street which led past the office to the wharf, they met Pendelton. He was hot and disheveled; the colonel supposed he must have been mistaken about his not being at the fire.

"I'll see you both in the morning," he called pleasantly, a few moments later, as he stepped aboard the launch. "And you get a good night's rest, Pendelton."

"Thank you, sir, I hope to," answered Pendelton.

Cutter laughed; and, when he was certain that the launch was out of hearing, he volunteered:

"You may, but I doubt it. We are going to sea tonight."

Pendelton did not seem particularly surprised.

"Tonight, eh?" he echoed.

Cutter's face was dark.

"Yes tonight. It's now or never. That prying old fool suspects something, and he'll keep worming at you tomorrow until you give yourself away. I know him! But he'll come down a peg when he finds that we have given him the slip right under his nose."

Pendelton sighed audibly. He looked years older than he had that first night on the beach. About his eyes there were little lines which had come to stay. But the tenseness was gone from his manner; of the two men he seemed the more composed, the more forceful, the stronger character.

"I suspected it," he said quietly, "when I saw the fire. But you are crazy, man; we could never get away."

"We'll chance it," answered Cutter briskly. "I'll leave a letter for him on the desk saying that we were suddenly called away by word of Ricardo and will be back tomorrow night. That will keep him guessing long enough to give us the start we need."

Pendelton drew a step nearer to the other man.

"Major," he said earnestly, "let's chuck the whole business. It's a mad scheme and will surely end in disaster. If you will forget it, I will. Only say the word and I promise you nobody will ever get a breath of it from me."

Cutter frowned impatiently.

"Mad or not, remember it's only due to me that you are not locked up under a charge of theft. I am engineering this deal. You be ready to open the safe at twelve o'clock—that's your part."

Crossing to the launch which was slowly backing into her mooring at the wharf, he began to issue instructions in a low voice to the *patron*.

COLONEL BRADLEY returned to his reports, but he could not lose himself in them with his customary absorption. Unconsciously he continued to rehearse that scene with Pendelton.

Cutter's explanation may have been the

true one, but he could not bring himself to think so. There was something back of it; no mere reproof would have affected Pendelton so deeply.

"I wish I had brought the boy back with me," he once muttered to himself, as looking up from his work he meditatively polished his glasses.

Finally he put the reports aside and, lighting a cigar, went on deck, dropped into a chair, and put his feet on the rail. It was his favorite position for thinking things over.

Eight bells had struck, and the colonel had risen and was stretching out his arms with a yawn preparatory to turning in for the night, when out of the darkness in the direction of the wharf he caught the faint sound of footsteps and of a low voice speaking sharply. He thought he recognized it as Cutter's.

Puzzled, he listened, his arms still outstretched; but for a time he caught no further sounds. He dropped his arms, shook his head and, slowly moving to the stern of the ship, again listened. A new sound caught his attention. It was unmistakable; the launch was cautiously leaving her moorings.

He darted to the door of the captain's room, where at a small green felt-covered table, the captain and the second-officer were indulging in a game of set-back.

"Have a boat lowered at once, Mr. Byrd, to take me ashore," he said crisply.

As the second-officer disappeared, he turned to the captain.

"How long would it take you to be ready to put to sea, Captain?" he asked.

"We could be under way in less than an hour, sir. But you ain't thinking of going out tonight, are you?"

"Perhaps. At any rate be ready, in case I should when I return."

Twenty minutes later with a final grunt in unison, six brown sailors drove the boat ashore on the beach beside the wharf. The launch was not in sight.

Colonel Bradley sprang ashore and nimbly ran up the deserted street to the Constabulary building. Before its doorway a chocolate-colored soldier was sitting; at the sound of footsteps, he looked up, and seeing the officer, leaped to his feet, rigidly presenting arms.

The colonel brushed past him into the office. On the table a small lamp was burning, dingily illuminating the room. The colonel glanced hurriedly about him. His eye fell on the letter. With an impatient gesture, he tore it open, read it and striding to the door called the sentry.

"Where is the major?" he asked.

"*Ha salido, Señor Coronel,*" said the man.

"I know, but where?"

"*Ne se, Señor Coronel.*" The man's tone was resignedly passive.

But by dint of prompting and after much effort, Colonel Bradley learned from him that some time before, Pendelton had come into the office, followed presently by Cutter with two men from the launch. The door was open, and through it the sentry, who had come into the hall, had seen the lieutenant open the safe and take from it a number of bags which he placed one by one in a large sack which the two men held open.

Then he had tied up the sack, and the men had swung it on a pole and carried it away, the officers marching behind them. And, *nombre de Dios*, that was all except that the *Señor Commandante* had cursed and beaten him for leaving his post. The man seemed both terrified and confused.

Colonel Bradley wheeled and for a moment stared at the safe which stood an empty counterfeit of integrity. Then he brought his fist down on the table with a bang which caused the lamp to dance.

"I might have guessed it—the hound!" he exclaimed.

The captain made good his promise. The launch had been gone little more than an hour, when the colonel climbed to the bridge of the *Rover* and, leaning upon the rail, peered through the darkness before him, as she noisily churned her way out to sea.

"You will head south, sir, I suppose," said the captain, as the swell of the open water began to lift her bows.

"Certainly," answered Colonel Bradley. "Their only chance is to make for Borneo. What can you squeeze out of her, Captain?"

"Ten knots, sir. We ought to pick 'em up tomorrow some time, if they're still afloat."

THE sun, rising over the rim of the Sulu Sea, shot its fresh, stimulating rays across the deck of the launch; and Pendelton, who had been half-sitting, half-lying on a coil of rope in her stern, drew himself to an upright position.

After a careful look about him, he examined the fastenings of his holster. Then drawing his knees toward his chin by clasping his hands about them, he sat apparently lost in thought. His face was hard, his mouth firmly shut; and whatever his thoughts, they did not cause his expression to vary. He seemed to have no concern with what was going on about him.

Cutter, however, standing beside the *patron* who held the spokes of the wheel, seemed burning with impatience, now urging the brown man to push her faster, now sweeping the rugged coast with his glasses. Occasionally he stepped to the side of the launch and turned his look on the sea behind them, a wide, gray, sparkling sheet, flecked with little crests of white above which gulls circled in wide, descending sweeps. But of sail or smoke there was no sign.

The launch rose and fell with the light swell, but under the lee of the island she slipped along rapidly.

Presently with a cry of relief, Cutter dropped his glasses and laid his hand on the *patron's* arm.

"*Aqui*," he said, pointing to the shore.

In the line of the coast there was a break—one of the inlets which dot the southern shores of Bulayan.

The launch headed for the inlet, and after half an hour of cautious navigation rounded a point which shut it off from the view of the sea. Behind the point in a wide semicircle swept a white, sandy beach, above which were visible the rude, straggling huts of a native fishing-village. *Bancas*, nets spread out to dry, bamboo rafts, the heterogeneous débris gathered in by the tide, cluttered the sands in disorder. A little way out, conspicuous by her size, by the graceful sweep of her lines, there rode at anchor a black *vinta*, one of the swift sailing-vessels which the Moros use in their journeyings on the sea.

"*Para*," said Cutter.

The bell clanged, the screw ceased to revolve, and under her momentum the launch glided in slowly toward the village. Then stepping to the bow, he drew his revolver and fired three shots into the air.

Ten minutes later the *vinta* drew alongside the launch. At its tiller stood Ricardo.

Cutter leaned over the rail and, steadying himself with one hand on the side of the other boat, carried on a whispered conversation with Ricardo. Once the Moro glanced significantly at Pendelton, his lips obviously framing a question.

Cutter shrugged; that was all. Then he drew back, his hand resting on his hip; while at a word from Ricardo, four men leaped from the *vinta* to the launch, seized the sack which was lying on the deck, and lowered it carefully into their own boat.

Pendelton made no protest. He simply sat, as he had for the past hour been sitting, apparently an interested but unconcerned spectator of what was going on about him. But in the depths of his eyes there was a queer gleam, almost of amusement.

Cutter crossed quickly to the companionway which led to the engine-room, down which he disappeared. When he returned after a brief absence he was wiping his hands on a piece of waste. Then without even a glance at the younger man he stepped aboard the *vinta*.

The sailing-vessel had rounded the point before Pendelton changed his position. Then, leaping to his feet, he strode up the deck as he called to the *patron:*

"*Dale vuelta a Porto Oporto.*"

The *patron* shook his head. He had been speaking in whispers to the engineer who, wide-eyed and cringing, had followed Cutter to the deck.

"*No puede, Señor*," he said.

The engines had been disabled; the launch was slowly drifting ashore.

Pendelton slipped from its fastenings the flag which all the while had been flying from the launch's stern, and tucked it into the bosom of his shirt. Then when he felt the scrape of sand along the keel, he dropped overboard into the water.

"Come on," he called to the *patron*, and together they waded ashore.

When at last they reached the beach which faced the open sea, two specks were visible; one the *vinta* disappearing to the south, the other the smoke of a steamer coming from the north. Pendelton cut a bamboo pole, fastened to it the flag and planted it firmly in the sand.

Then he sat down and began to laugh, a dry, ringing, mirthless laugh, a laugh which brought tears to his eyes and was occasionally cut through with something almost like a sob. The *patron* folded his hands in silent prayer, until at last the white man fell back exhausted. Then he pulled the broad-brimmed, campaign hat down over the drawn face to shield its eyes from the glare of the sun.

There an hour later Colonel Bradley found them. From the native he learned of Cutter's escape and the helplessness of the launch.

PENDELTON opened his eyes slowly. The bed on which he was lying felt cool, soft, deliciously refreshing to his tired body. Through a small, square window on a level with his glance a brisk breeze was blowing, stirring the white, crisply laundered curtains; and in his ears there sounded a steady, pulsating throb. He recognized it presently as the beating of the screw.

With a sigh of contentment he rolled lazily on his side and found himself looking squarely into the eyes of Colonel Bradley who, sitting at his desk, had turned at the sounds of movement.

"How do you feel?" asked the colonel.

"Pretty raw, sir, but I think I'll be all right after a bit to eat."

The colonel pushed a button, and when the China boy appeared in the doorway, gave an order. Then he turned back to his desk and went on with his work, until with a gratified sigh, Pendelton announced:

"I've finished, sir."

Colonel Bradley switched his chair, and leaning forward for the second time, said:

"Now tell me all about it."

And this time Pendelton told him.

"So that is why you kept quiet before, is it?" asked the colonel at the conclusion of the story.

"Yes, sir," said Pendelton. "I had given my word. I had to keep it. But where are we now, sir?"

"Going up the bay to Porto Oporto. We'll cable to the authorities in Borneo, and send a cutter out from Jolo. We may catch him, but there is a chance, a good chance, that he may get clean away. For your sake I hope he does not."

Pendelton looked up in surprise.

"Why for my sake, sir?"

"Because," answered the colonel in a dry tone, "I am afraid that if we do not get the money, keeping your word is going to get you into pretty serious trouble. You seem to forget that you were responsible for its safe keeping, and technically at least you helped steal it."

For a moment Pendelton stared at him blankly; and then he had difficulty in keeping himself from going off again into that wild paroxysm of laughter. But he choked down the impulse.

"Didn't you get my letter, sir?"

"Letter? No. What letter?"

"The one I went back and gave to the sentry to hand you. In it I told you that I had promised Cutter to help him steal what was in the safe; but that before I did so, I intended to take the money out and replace it with some bogus sacks which I had fixed up for the purpose. When I saw that fire, I thought he might try to run for it last night, so I slipped into the office, made the substitution, and added a postscript to my letter, telling you where I had buried the money in the garden. I was hoping that he might go without me, but I didn't suggest it for fear that he might suspect something."

"And he didn't?"

"Not a thing: he was too keen on getting away."

"But if he had—suppose he had opened one of those sacks?"

Pendelton's brows contracted slightly.

"I don't know. I'd have pointed out to him that I was doing what I had agreed to—perhaps. Well, at any rate, he certainly wouldn't have gotten that money. But as it was, everything went my way."

Colonel Bradley stared at Pendelton quizzically. Then he broke into a laugh.

"Well, I'll be——!" he said at length, with a chuckle; and the way he said it seemed to please Pendelton, who answered:

"And so I suppose will Cutter when he opens those sacks among his Moro friends and finds them full of packages of blank paper and round iron washers about the size of pesos."

OLE LEKKER'S RIDE

by HUGH S. FULLERTON

Author of "Hit by Pitched Ball," "Stolen Signals," etc.

THE western coast of the lower peninsula of Michigan is of peculiar geological and geographical formation. Bare half-mountains of sand rise precipitously from the edge of the water as if they were ramparts thrown up to protect the land from the ever-attacking waves.

If you coast northward along that shore in some lazy yacht or plodding steamship you may see, every few miles, a breach in these ramparts of sand, and, when the sun is shining, you may catch glimpses through these embrasures of shining waters where lakes lie entrapped by the dunes only a few rods from the parent body.

Far north there is a gigantic breach in these fortifications where, perhaps, in one wild charge, Lake Michigan drove a wedge of water sixty miles southward before the clay hills halted it, forming Grand Travers Bay. Near the tip of the western peninsula that was formed when the bay was made, you will see, jutting far out into the lake, a huge hog-back of shining white sand, bare and smooth.

The Indians called this Sleeping Bear; at the south is a wide blue bay, and, jutting out to form the southern tip of this crescent, is a purgatory of wind-beaten sand, tossed and drifted, and piled by the winds, and battered by waters.

A few clumps of evergreen trees that have withstood the engulfing sands break the white of the billowed dunes. Blackened, contorted tree-trunks, buried to their lower limbs in sand, show where a forest was engulfed. At the tip of this desolation you will find a lighthouse, and near by it, sheltered behind a ridge of sand, is a row of small, whitewashed cabins, marked "Irish Village," "Crank's Nest," and "Pea-Soup Inn," and a larger house wherein, all white and shiny, are the surf boats. This is Point Betsie.

If you land on Point Betsie some Summer's day and struggle through the shifting, sliding sand for a mile, you will emerge from the glare and whiteness of the dunes into a valley of ancient pine-trees, through which winds a cool lane, and, if you peep ahead down the tunnel of trees, you will catch a glimpse of a wonderfully beautiful lake called "Crystal," the waters of which are as clear as the springs that feed it.

When you emerge from the cool valley of the pines you may see, ten miles away at the opposite end of the lake, a little white-and-green village cuddled close to the water's edge. The lake is hemmed in by tree-clad hills, from which cold brooks come leaping down. Two promontories bulge out boldly.

Crystal Lake lies prisoned by these hills, save at the corner at which you came from the dunes. There the land is low. At some far day, just after the giant iceberg wallowed and shoved and groaned in making its death-bed where the lake now is, Crystal and Michigan were connected.

It is very beautiful in Summer, when motor-boats purr and snort, and oars clank musically; when the voices of young people rise in songs and laughter; when children romp upon the wide beaches or in the shallow waters. Along the shores, half hidden in the glistening green of young birch, or the darker green of pine and maple, white and red and brown and green cottages send up lazy shafts of wood smoke.

It is very beautiful, very peaceful in the Summer, but in Winter it is different. Then the northwesters come roaring down from the straits. The hurricanes rage between the Bear Islands, howl past the Manitous, beat upon the old Sleeping Bear until he seems to grunt and stir uneasily, and, freed from restraint, they hurl themselves upon the defenseless Point Betsie.

Seas pile thirty feet high upon the bars that hedge the point. The winds, as if allied with Lake Michigan in its age-old effort to rescue Crystal from the imprisoning hills, roar through the gap, tear and rip at the great pines, and, falling in fury upon fair Crystal, lash her into a torment of water and ice.

On such a night Ole Lekker's ride was made.

If, after you have wearied your eyes gazing upon the beauty that is Crystal's, you turn away and follow the course of a beautiful road that winds and falls and lifts southward over ridge after ridge of hills, you will come presently to Frankfort, a village straggling along the edge of Little Betsie Lake to where the channel opens to let the big boats come in from Lake Michigan. When you reach Frankfort ask the first person you see where "Doc" is, and, when you find his office, and a jolly, round-faced man shakes hands and smiles, ask him if you may see Ole's automobile. He will, if he is not too busy, take you to the shed in the yard at the rear of his office, open the door, and show you a mass of wrecked, twisted, battered steel and iron and leather, and, if you appear properly curious, he will tell you the story of the ride.

But first he will tell you who Ole was.

OLE drifted into Frankfort eight years before his ride. He came on a car-ferry from Green Bay, and he was sick with smallpox. Doc was a newcomer in Frankfort, with small practise, and, when all others fled, he took Ole to a deserted cabin that the town hastily secured, and nursed him back to health, burned the cabin, and brought Ole to his rooms to be his man.

Afterward Ole was a fixture. His name was Le Clerc, transposed to Lekker by some purser who spelled the names of the crew by ear. He was fifty-two years old, and had fished and followed the lake from boyhood. His father had been a French Canadian lumberjack, and his mother a Swede, daughter of a lake fisherman.

To them two children had been born—first, Ole Le Clerc, named by his mother, and, seven years later, René Le Clerc. The boys had been separated for thirty years, and Ole's life dream was to find his brother.

"René she somewhere on Lak Mich. Ay ban find heem," he said. His faith was unlimited.

He spoke a strange dialect—a mixture of Swedish and French Canadian. He ignored all rules of gender, and with that combination he talked the argot of the fresh-water sailormen. He was very serious, even solemn, and devoted to Doc. He became a character. Instead of saying, "Good morning, Ole," the townspeople said, "Found your brother yet, Ole?"

Always he replied: "Not yet. Doc she find heem."

This was because of the fact that, when Ole was delirious and raving in his worst stage of the fever that accompanies smallpox, he pleaded for his brother, and Doc promised to find him. So Ole drove Doc's horses, did the chores and cooking in the bachelor apartments behind the office, and waited for Doc to find René.

When the doctor, keeping pace with progress, purchased an automobile, Frankfort roared at the thought of Ole as chauffeur. Ole regarded the new runabout seriously, and said:

"Ay tank Ay ban run heem. Ay ban wiper on gasoline boat vonce."

Frankfort ceased to laugh. Ole drove the runabout, and the manner in which he sent it over the sand hills and deep, rutted roads, and kept it in perfect repair without aid from the garage man was the envy of other owners of machines.

ON THE night of February seventeenth, a northwester was howling down from the straits. Frankfort, sheltered behind its high, forest-crowned hill, felt only the backwash of the hurricane and heard the roar of the surf like the pounding of heavy artillery.

There had been a thaw. For three days a soft south wind had blown steadily; and one night a gentle rain fell. The heavy snows of Winter were sinking by day to freeze again at night.

The ice in lakes and harbor was rotting. Heavy groanings came from it at times when the seas grew restless, and at any moment might be expected the crashing, booming, grinding sounds that mark the breaking up of the Winter's ice.

That afternoon the wind had shifted suddenly to west, then to northwest, and hour by hour the gale increased, the sea ran higher, and the cold that had promised early departure, returned.

"Bad night, Ole," remarked Doc, as his man came into the study to replenish the fire. "Getting colder, isn't it?"

"She sleet now," said Ole. "Mak ice on snow. Bad for tires."

"Well," yawned the doctor, "I hope we don't have to go out tonight."

Just at that moment the telephone bell rang.

"This is Point Betsie," said a voice. "The boys have just brought in a man off the ice — blown overboard from some freighter. Reached shore-ice and tried to reach the Point. He's badly frost-bitten, and one of his legs is crushed and torn—caught between two cakes of ice."

"Is he bleeding badly?"

"Not much. Cold and freezing water checked it; but he's bleeding worse since we got him here where it's warm."

"Fold a towel four or five times, wrap it around the leg above the wounds. Put a stick through the towel, and twist hard enough to stop circulation. Have a lot of water boiling. Give him a whiff of that chloroform I left when Jackson was hurt—just enough to deaden pain, and a teaspoonful of brandy every ten minutes until I get there."

"Ole," he said, turning sharply to his man. "Can we get to Point Betsie?"

"Ay tank not," said Ole, unmoved. "We try her."

"How is the road to Crystal?"

"She ban bad. Snow he deep by cemetery. We make her."

"Can we get around the lake road?"

"Ay tank not. Snow he eight—ten feet deep drifts. Wagon she stuck las' week."

"We'll go as far as we can in the car and try to get through on foot," said the doctor, hastily packing instruments and bandages. "Get out the car while I change clothes."

"Ay tank we bust her," said Ole.

"Smash her up if you can get me through," snapped the doctor. "A man is dead unless we get there."

"Ay ban smash her," responded Ole placidly. "Heem a good car," he added with more than usual disregard for gender.

The main street of Frankfort was coated with rutted snow, freezing into spikes and knife edges of ice. The light car raced crunchingly over this surface, splattering the occupants with half-congealed water that had gathered in the wagon-ruts. It turned northward, held for a little way under the lee of the hill and reached the outskirts of the village.

The first steep hill loomed ahead. The headlights of the car revealed two rivulets of water flowing downward in deep wagon-ruts, cut in the heavy snow. But for those grooves the road and fields were unbroken white, save where the tops of fence-posts protruded.

Holding the car-wheels in the ruts, Ole sent it splashing and crunching up grade, and, whirling around a curve where the wheels tried in vain to skid and were held by the packed snow, the car doubled around the elbow of a hill and raced out on to the plateau.

There for the first time the full force of the hurricane struck them, almost blowing the breath from their bodies. The car seemed to stagger under the shock of the wind which whined in the wind-shield and screamed over their heads. The wind was coming, unimpeded, down from the straits, laden with particles of ice that stung, and seemed to sear the flesh.

At intervals drops of water, not yet frozen, pelted upon them, froze, and seemed to blow entirely through their clothing and strike upon naked flesh. The howling of the wind, the beating of the ice, rain, the crunching of the tires through frozen and freezing snow, made conversation impossible save in shouted sentences. The roadway was slippery where the snow had blown from it, and the car skidded and lurched on these spots.

Ole sat bolt upright at the steering-wheel. His mustache was a walrus tusk of ice, and icicles hung from his hair and the edge of his cap. The doctor, huddling down behind the wind-shield, sought protection from the blast and drew his muffler tighter around his face.

The pace of the car slackened.

"Ay tank I have to open heem," yelled Ole above the storm's roar. "She all cover with ice, so Ay can't see!"

He tilted the wind-shield, and the wind beat and howled through the aperture upon the huddled doctor.

THEY reached the crest of the hill where the road turns sharply and drops downward in a sweeping curve around the cemetery. The wind had swept the road almost free of snow above the curve, and Ole, releasing his clutch, allowed the car to coast down the steep roadway. It slid and skidded, but after sliding almost to the snow-filled ditch, it righted and raced downward at a dizzy speed. The wind was shrieking up the defile, straight into their faces, and the doctor shivered and clung to the seat.

Half-way down the hill a barrier stretched across the roadway. They were upon it before the doctor's shout of warning died away. There was a shock, a lurch, and the car reeled and staggered. Steam hissed from the engine as the snow, driven through the radiator, struck the hot steel.

A cloud of steam, ice and snow enveloped the car and its occupants. An instant later the car freed itself from the snow-drift and plunged on down the hill, running over the icy roadway.

At the foot of the hill a small rivulet crosses the road; and at one side is a watering-trough, where the horses quench their thirst in Summer. The headlights showed no trace of watering-trough, but instead, a series of huge, rounded drifts, laid in windrows across the roadway.

Into these, with the full power of the engine, added to its impetus, Ole drove the machine. It half mounted the first ridge, the wheels failing to break the packed snow, and from that it leaped into the next drift, half-burying itself in the smother of snow churned up by its plunge and by the whirling wheels.

Lurching and staggering like a boat, it fought through that drift, half-stalled in the next, and almost stopped. The wheels, wrapped in chains as they were, tore at the packed snow, sent it flying in clouds until, gripping with its chains the frozen pack below, it lunged forward, freed itself from the mass, and, shaking itself like a dog emerging from water, sped hissing and steaming up the next hill.

At the crest of the hill Ole stopped the car in the shelter of a high clay cutting.

"She boiling," he said calmly.

The doctor leaped out and held his watch to the headlights.

"Twelve minutes!" he cried. "Ole, you're a wonder!"

"She good little car," said Ole. "Ay hate to smash heem."

They regained breath under the shelter of the bank at the hilltop, and Ole, while waiting for the water to cease boiling, calmly inspected the machine. One fender was torn loose and was rubbing the tire, and Ole, bracing his foot, ripped it from the body of the car. The wind-shield was smashed, one bar was bent, and Ole, using his knee as a lever, straightened it, then with his hands felt over the tires.

"Thees von she bust soon," he announced, and, climbing back into the car, started it down the next hill, gaining speed.

"Hold on when she boomp!" he screamed.

They were speeding downward at a terrific pace. The wind seemed suddenly to cease blowing as they dropped behind the heavily wooded hills of the camp-meeting ground.

At the foot of the hill the road dives down a steep declivity into an arched tunnel, where the trees meet and interlock their branches; and after a hundred yards it emerges into a valley that forms a "draw" between the high hills and extends from Lake Michigan to Crystal. Through that "draw" the winds blow as through a crevasse, and, all Winter, the eddying currents of the "draw" had swept the snows inland to heap them in the valley. Wagons had beaten a track through the drifts, pounded the snow hard, and, as each storm heaped the snow higher, passing wheels pounded it down again until a narrow causeway of hard, packed snow-ice, six feet thick, underlaid the fresher drifts.

The rains and thaw had left the rounded causeway bare in spots, and the softer snow had retreated down the slopes, leaving a rounded surface, now covered with a glaze of fresh ice from the sleet and rain.

At this barrier of snow and ice Ole sent the machine. The wheels skidded and slid sideways. The car turned half upon its side, until the soft snow prevented it from overturning. The giant Swede clung to the wheel and swerved the car by main strength. It climbed the ridge, slid off the other side, plunged forward again, righted itself and crashed into packed snow as if against a stone wall.

The doctor, carrying the ruins of the wind-shield with him, catapulted out into the snow. Ole's body was driven against the steering-wheel with such force that the breath was driven from his lungs in a great grunt. One lamp was smashed and bent backward. The engine, sizzling as the snow was pressed in upon it, ceased to throb. The doctor arose from the drift. Ole, regaining breath, sat upright.

"Ay gar!" he said as if in surprise. "Ay tank she stop."

Slowly Ole clambered from the car, reached the front of the machine, placed his huge shoulder against the radiator, braced his feet, and by a terrific effort shoved it backward out of the soft snow, and part of the way back upon the icy causeway. Then he cranked-up, listened to the engine race, clambered back into his seat, and, reversing, backed ten feet along the ice.

Then, with his foot pressing the accelerator to full extent, he sent the car hurtling into the snow-drift again. It struck with terrific force, climbed upon the harder snow, lurched out of the beaten trail, and sank to its body in the softer drift. Three times, while the doctor stood watching, Ole repeated the effort to batter a way through that drift; and finally on the fifth charge the car went over and through, and, lurching wildly, skidded, righted itself and raced up the hill.

Under the shelter of the dining-hall where the campers congregate in Summer for meals, Ole stopped the car and waited for Doc. A hundred yards further is the beach of Crystal Lake, and the road turns at right angles, following the base of the hills for three miles through an arcade of trees that fringe the wide beach. Under the shelter of the dining-hall, and the high hill, the fury of the storm was abated. There Ole overhauled his car while Doc went forward to reconnoiter and find the condition of the road around the end of the lake.

A few rods beyond where the road turns, the Inn stands, facing out upon the beach. That far the doctor fought his way into the teeth of the gale, over drifts in the darkness. Then he retreated.

"No use trying the road, Ole," he reported. "The drifts are eight feet high in places—and it probably is worse farther along. We'll have to try it on foot."

"Ay tank we try the ice. Maybe she hold," said Ole calmly.

It is three miles across the lake from the assembly pier to the dock at Martin's where the Point Betsie trail leaves the road to cross that inferno of sand-dune and buried forest to the Point.

"The ice!" exclaimed the doctor. "It has been breaking up."

"Ay tank she hold, maybe," said Ole. "Ay ban listen—she not grinding. Wind she pack her tight."

"I hear something——"

The doctor admits he hesitated.

"Crystal she mak no noise," said Ole. "Ay ban hear old Lak Mich. Yoomp up."

The doctor "yoomped." Ole cranked the machine again, clambered to his seat, and they moved slowly out from the road across the wide beach and straight for the lake. A mountain-like barrier of ice, piled up in the early season's gales, lined the shore, but straight ahead there was a break where the harvesters had chopped a path to haul ice from the lake.

Through this gap Ole sent the machine on to the open lake. It lurched and swerved over rough ice and turned northwestward to follow the shore-line. The hurricane, sweeping through the gap and across the open lake, beat upon them, driving the stinging ice in fierce, gusty showers into their faces.

Two hundred yards from the shore, almost all around Crystal, the shallow water ends in a sheer drop to great depths. Along that ledge that divides the deeps from the shallows, another windrow of ice was heaped, and, between the inner and outer ice-barriers the floe lay unbroken and comparatively smooth. Evidently the ice on the lake had started to break up, but some shift of the wind had stopped its progress.

The car moved forward steadily, bouncing and jumping, held back by sheer force of the wind. An explosion, followed by a lurch and a sickening skid, caused Ole to jam on the brakes hard.

"One tire she blow off," he reported, howling the news above the roar of the hurricane.

Then he clambered back to his seat and sent the car forward. A black mass loomed ahead and slowly took shape in the waving glare of the one remaining headlight.

"It's Beachy's Pier!" shouted the doctor.

"Ay gar!" said Ole. "Ice she ban pile up on breakwater."

Just beyond the end of the concrete pier and boat-house a crescent-shaped concrete breakwater lies to shelter the motor-boats in Summer. In front of this, and seemingly all over the breakwater, upreared, contorted ice-cakes were piled.

"Can we get through?" screamed the doctor.

"Ay tank ice she smashed up," said Ole. "We ban try."

He sent the car forward. The doctor remembers little of the next few moments. Ole guided the car straight out upon the heaving mass of ice-cakes that were grinding against the concrete breakwater. Once the ice sank, and the rear wheels, finding water between two cakes, sprayed the riders with icy water. They sloshed and churned through the grinding pack, scraped along the concrete, turned shoreward and ran out onto solid ice again.

Another tire blew out, but they stopped only to free the wheel of the shredded rubber, and, running on the two rear rims, they moved forward again. In five minutes more the doctor felt the force of the gale diminishing, and knew they were closer under the shelter of the heavily wooded hills inshore, running just outside the piled-up shore-ice.

"Ness, he ban drag out ice for Martin's house," said Ole. "Ay ban look for her track."

In a few minutes the one light revealed a breach in the ice wall, and from it a beaten track leading across the beach. Ole turned the car through this embrasure, and, pounding and lurching over frozen sand and hard-packed snow, they reached the road sheltered by the giant pines, and a moment later turned into the trail that leads to the dunes.

FOR the first time Nature favored them. No automobile can go over that trail of shifting sand. But on this night the rain and sleet, freezing upon the surface, had formed a crust upon which the car rode for half a mile to where all vegetation ends, and the chaos of shifting sand commences.

They fought their way up the first steep sand-dune and pounded and clanked down the lakeward slope. In the valley was another drift through which they struggled. The collision with that drift wrecked the remaining lamp. They were in darkness save when the light from the great lamp on Betsie whirled and illuminated the skies above them.

The roar of the surf beating upon the bars was deafening now, and the full force of the wind blew their words away as they screamed at each other. One more dune was crested, and, descending the next slope, another tire exploded. The car lurched sideways, collided with a buried stump, and stopped.

"Ay tank she not run," said Ole sadly, as he shook himself out of the snow-drift into which he had been hurled.

"Come on!" commanded the doctor, and, seizing his cases, he bowed his head to the blast, and dived forward toward the beach.

Ten minutes later, the doctor, breathless from the buffeting of the wind, staggered into the nearest cottage. The suffering man lay moaning feebly upon a cot, while the life-savers, their preparations completed, waited.

"Is he alive?" the doctor panted.

"Doc!" exclaimed a guard, "how did you get here? We telephoned only fifty-five minutes ago!"

"Ole!" gasped the doctor. "He brought me. It seemed a month."

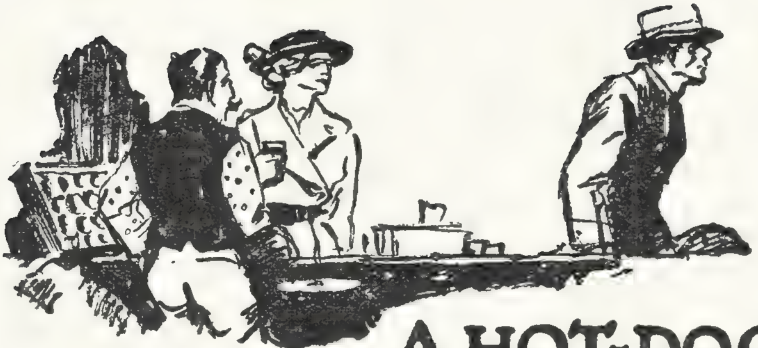
In fifteen minutes, his hands restored from numbness by hot water and a hard massage, the doctor directed the giving of the anesthetics. Inside an hour the amputation operation was completed, the other wounds dressed, and the patient, still unconscious, was carried to a cot in the next room. The doctor, exhausted, sank into a chair by the big stove.

At that moment the door opened and Ole entered.

"By gar!" he said in a hoarse whisper. "Engine she ban all right. Pipe he broke and gas she run out."

He tiptoed heavily to the door of the adjoining room and peeped in at the patient. Suddenly he removed his cap and stood, bareheaded, his lips moving in prayer.

"By gar!" he said slowly. "She ban my brother, René."



A HOT-DOG IN A HURRY

By C·HILTON-TURVEY

Author of "Spangles and Soapsuds," "How It Ended," etc.

HE SLID between the tail of an auto-truck and the fender of a trolley-car, just missed the front wheel of a whizzing motor-cycle, and, arriving at the curb, made a dive for the little stand on the corner.

He threw down five cents.

"A hot dog in a hurry!" he demanded, and chafed while Paolo, beset with custom, ladled out a glass of birch beer to a woman with a black bag on her arm.

When the "dog" was speared on a fork and slapped between two slabs of roll, he grabbed it out of Paolo's hand and began to devour it then and there.

He was a thin man, lanky, and full of unexpected joints, which set every way of the compass. As he stood he balanced about, first on one foot, then on the other, as if he grudged himself time to eat. His high, square shoulders humped forward — perpetually escaping doors that were a size too low. His lean cheeks bristled with the stubble of a week. His nose was bulbous and artistic, and he had one beaming blue eye and one contemplative brown eye. Altogether this gave him a now-you-see-it-and-now-you-don't expression that was generally provocative of interest and a second look.

The woman took him in as she imbibed her soft drink, leaning comfortably against the stand, like a man at a bar.

He gulped down the last bite, stepped long-leggedly over a passing cat on the way to the curb, and reached the other side of the street after a couple of hair-raising escapes. Then with a final plunge he passed 'round the corner, out of sight, still on the stride of one catching the next train.

The woman met the eye of the eatery-keeper with a twinkle in her own.

"'A hot dog in a hurry' for sure!" she observed.

Paolo stared a moment, then chuckled:

"Dat's heem—dat's heem! Wan hotta dog eena hurry!"

He took the empty glass from her and rinsed it in a pail, still giggling delightedly over the label she had tagged on his late customer.

"Who's your friend anyhow, Paolo?" she asked interestedly.

Paolo wrinkled his brown face, trying for the right word, till he looked like a marmoset.

"I no can tal you," he said. "So mooch friends I got—their face I know; but more? Never!" He threw out his hands in a characteristic gesture. "You come," he went on with a smile, "you come ever' day for the bircha beer—the ice-creama cone—the leetla candy. But Paolo, he no can tal what ees your name!"

He paused, a faint tinge of curiosity in his attitude.

The woman flipped him two cents for the drink.

"I don't mind telling you," she said with mock seriousness, "that my name is Miss Dem."

Paolo nodded.

"Mees Dam," he echoed thoughtfully. "Mees Dam."

"So you don't know anything about him?" she asked again, nodding toward the corner where the "Hot Dog" had disappeared.

"But yes," Paolo answered eagerly. "Thees man," he informed her, tapping his forehead portentously, "he is—what you call smart—oh, very smart."

"Ketches fireflies for a living, eh?"

Paolo shook his head.

"Heem, he maka the grr-eat idea, and he weel sell thees idea for wan—mebbe two—mebbe t'ree t'ousand dolla! He weel be the reech, reech man some day!"

Paolo stuck out his chest and smote it with his fist.

"Bully for him!" Miss Dem commented. "But if he doesn't eat more than a hot dog and a roll for lunch he won't live to know about it."

"Yes, he ees lika the starva cat—so thin," Paolo agreed. "And some days I must even trust heem for the nickel."

He put up one brown hand to conceal this damaging statement from a possible listener.

Two schoolboys came flying round the corner.

"Gimme two vanilla cones!" one demanded.

"A stick a' peppermint!" bawled the other.

Miss Dem picked up her bag and departed.

AFTER this she met the Hot Dog quite often. Always, as on the first day, he was in a desperate hurry. Occasionally she passed the time of day with him. Once when Paolo had a stress of customers and the Hot Dog stood chafing, he confided to Miss Dem that he was anxious to get back home, because an invention he was perfecting was almost done, and he could hardly wait to finish it. Miss Dem noticed that he stuttered a little.

Before he could say more, Paolo handed out his frankfurtered roll, and he bolted it as a hungry dog bolts a chunk of meat. In a moment he was gone without another word.

A few days later, Miss Dem, passing down a side street, was almost knocked off her feet by a crowd of men, women, and children that poured yelling from a battered brownstone house in the middle of the block. after them came a cloud of smoke and an acrid odor.

"Fire! Fire!" they cried as they came.

Some one sent in an alarm.

A man came stumbling down the steps. His hair was singed, his eyebrows burned, his face black, and his clothes smoking—the Hot Dog!

"There he is!" some one yelled, and the crowd made for him.

In the excited chatter, Miss Dem made out that they held the Hot Dog responsible. They grabbed him at all points, but his singed clothes gave at every pull. He kept rescuing an arm or a leg from the mauling, and smilingly explaining to the crowd how it happened. And in all that porridge of dialects and fierce cries, he was quite unafraid, even cheerful.

The crowd increased. It filled the street from curb to curb. The din was terrific. The Lord only knew what those on the outside of it thought the Hot Dog had done—murder, or roasting babies, or something of the sort.

He was in a fair way to be damaged. Already a Hebrew fist had put one eye out of commission—the brown one—but the blue one still beamed courageously.

They were pulling at him as dogs pull at a stag at bay, and battering his thin body wherever they could reach him. Some one shied a stone from the outskirts of the crowd. It hit him on the cheek. The blood streamed down his face.

He reeled and staggered against the railing.

This was the last straw for Miss Dem. She had held off as long as possible. Now she fought her way to him, jabbing with her elbows, hitting out with her feet.

In another moment she stood beside the Hot Dog, a little out of breath, but full of ginger. She grabbed a wrist descending with a vicious fist on the end of it.

"What's the matter?" she demanded of the owner, a soiled man with a black beard and a pirate's nose.

He wrenched his arm out of her grasp and waved dramatically at the Hot Dog.

"Him, he iss purn our house down!" he shouted passionately.

Miss Dem turned and took a look at the house, which still stood solid behind them.

"I hadn't noticed it," she observed, shrugging her shoulders.

"He iss purn it down one time pefore aletty!" the man declared savagely. "If I ketch him——"

The crowd edged closer. Curiosity drew the outer circle, but the inner group was in the mood of hornets disturbed. All shouted at once. Miss Dem's answer was drowned in the din. A boy threw a turnip in the direction of the Hot Dog. As it hurtled past Miss Dem's nose she reached out and catching it neatly on the fly, inspected it with interest. There was comedy in the movement.

Some one snickered. A man began to elbow his way out of the crush, in evident disgust that nothing more dramatic was doing. A few others followed with the usual contagion. Then, before things could whip up again, the gong of the patrol-wagon sounded at the corner. The crowd parted. The wagon dashed through.

An officer sprang out.

"What's the matter?" he asked in a voice of authority.

The man with the pirate's nose made answer, and those near him endorsed his accusation. The officer brushed them aside and dived into the house. A wisp of gray smoke eddied out of the hall door.

In a moment he reappeared and looked about him.

"Here, you!" he said to the Hot Dog, who had straightened up and mopped the trickle of blood from his face. "Been playin' with matches again, eh?"

"N-no," returned the Hot Dog. "I——"

The officer seized him by the arm.

"Explain to the sergeant!" he commanded, and urged him toward the patrol-wagon, scattering the crowd with his stick.

A sudden impulse struck Miss Dem. She turned to the policeman with the flash of a smile.

"I'm in this thing, too," she announced with an air of candor.

"Come on, then," the officer bade her.

He stood aside at the steps, and helped her in. They were off with the clamor of the gong sounding above the racket of the street. The crowd jammed round, eager to see the end of things. But after they had trotted a few blocks their interest fell off, and it was only a small remnant that trailed up the station steps to be finally shooed away by an inexorable guard at the door.

The examination was quickly through. A few dry questions from the sergeant brought out the fact that the fire was accidental, the result of a laboratory experiment in which the Hot Dog was engaged. He proved to the satisfaction of the sergeant that he had used all possible precautions.

Miss Dem learned for the first time the name of the Hot Dog—Jimmy Squires. It seemed to fit him, for some mysterious reason.

"Discharged!" the sergeant said at last, with a wave of dismissal. Then with an afterthought, "Wait a minute!"

He turned over the pages of the book before him.

"Hm," he observed, taking another look at the prisoner, "this is the second time you've set that rookery on fire, ain't it?"

A smile flickered over the face of the Hot Dog.

"Y-yes," he answered simply.

The sergeant shut the book with a snap.

"Better build yourself an asbestos house," he advised, "for the next time you come here I won't be so easy with you." He turned to Miss Dem with the perceptible change in manner her sex draws out of the materialist man. "What are you here for?" he asked, tapping with a lead-pencil on the desk. "Been playing with matches, too?"

She answered with a nonchalant twinkle.

"No, I'm just a neighbor, come to tell you Mr. Squires is all right, and that he didn't mean to do it."

The Hot Dog looked at her with real interest. Evidently the word "neighbor" appealed to him.

They walked out of the station together. It was characteristic of him that he did not trouble to thank Miss Dem for the interference that had saved him from further damage. It is doubtful if he realized that he had been in danger. But the word "neighbor" had made a hit with him.

"S-so you're a neighbor of mine," he ventured, adding, "I'm from the country where they have 'em—they d-don't s-seem to, here in the city."

"Bless your heart," Miss Dem confessed, "we're too busy tryin' to be neighborly with ourselves to take time bein' neighborly to any one else."

He turned and surveyed her interestedly. "W-what do you do?" he asked with a frankness that for some reason was friendly and not at all intrusive.

"Me?" she laughed. "Oh, I manicure people's faces, and make such bee-uties out of plain folks that they have to tie their heads up in veils to keep the crowds from follering them around."

"Stage people?" he asked.

"And movies," she added.

She was surprised at the animation that sprang up in his face.

"C-could you g-get me in at one of the b-big plants?"

"I guess so," Miss Dem nodded.

He beamed on her, and proceeded to tell her why he wanted the favor. He was at work on a non-inflammable, non-explosive film. A disastrous fire in a cinema plant, resulting from the explosion of a safe full of films, had set him thinking. He had been at work on the problem for several months with nothing more to his credit than half a dozen small fires and the accumulated ill-will of the foreign element in his house and the immediate neighborhood.

"B-but," he finished, "I've got the hang of it now."

IT WAS about a week afterward that he came to Paolo's establishment so joyous that he could hardly stand still to eat his sausage in its blanket of roll. When Miss Dem hove in sight he sang out happily to her:

"I've h-hit it this time—right in the eye!"

"Good for you!" she commented heartily.

"C-come round and see," he begged her. "I've g-got a roll of film so fire-proof that you c-could c-cook on it!"

Miss Dem jumped at the chance to see Jimmy Squires in his lair. They walked up the street together, and presently she followed the inventor up three flights of dingy stairs to his little garret.

She had seen editorial sanctums, so she did not drop dead at the disorder, nor did she ask for a chair. There were two, piled high with papers, a rickety desk, and a table that held a one-jet gas-stove. A sevenfold row of bottles stood like battered soldiers against the wall. A glass retort faced them from the other side. Test tubes of all sizes and ages lay all over the floor. The inventor steered his swift steps among them almost without looking.

"Here," he said, and picked up a roll of film from the window-sill, "this is finished."

He struck a match and applied it, his long lean hands trembling with eagerness. The match burned under it to the last half inch, without doing more than smoking the stuff, exactly as it would have smoked a china saucer or a bit of graniteware.

Miss Dem's eyes were round with astonishment.

"There's a fortune in that for you," she announced. "I'll take you to the biggest movie man I know, any day you like—and I wish you luck!"

She picked up a piece of film from the window-sill, and holding it up to the light, glanced at the name that ran along the edge.

"'The Half-Moon Photo-Play Company,'" she read aloud.

The Hot Dog nodded.

"A m-man got me some old films to experiment with off their waste pile."

A few days later Miss Dem ushered Jimmy Squires into Mr. Morisson's private office.

"Here's what you movie men have been yelping for," she told him. "Fireproof films."

Morisson looked the young man over keenly. Without a word he motioned him to a seat and heard all he had to say with that unmistakable expression of doubt and bored indifference against which inventors have had to struggle since the dawn of the world.

The Hot Dog saw that Morisson was branded Missouri, and he manfully strove to do his part in the corollary. He stammered painfully in the face of the unsympathetic silence. Finally he took a roll of film from his pocket and struck a match under it.

For the first time Mr. Morisson showed interest. He leaned forward and watched the flame rise and smoke the translucent photograph, then die out.

The Hot Dog held up the film for Morisson to see, having brushed off the char left by the match.

The millionaire reached out and took it into his own hands. Plainly he was impressed. After a moment's minute inspection he handed it back to the inventor. His countenance was as blank as a wall.

"Well, really," he demurred, "there isn't much use for such an invention—we are so careful, that the chance of explosion or destruction by fire is negligible."

Miss Dem's mouth dropped wide open. She had personally seen Mr. Morisson tear his hair because of the film fire danger. And she knew of other movie men who were doing the selfsame thing. Yet here was Morisson——

Her eyes fell from his expressionless face to his hand. He grasped a pencil, and his fingers were so tight about it that they showed up chalk-white against the scarlet blotter.

Over Mr. Morisson's fat shoulder she closed one eye in emphatic reassurance to the Hot Dog, who was looking the picture of blank disappointment.

"We won't eat up any more of your time, Mr. Morisson," she said, tapping the inventor on the arm.

A moment more and they stood outside the office in the hall that faced the stairway.

"Pick yourself up," she advised Jimmy Squires encouragingly. "If I know anything about Mr. Billy Morisson, he's going to get after your stuff with all claws."

"With both f-feet, you mean," the inventor growled. "It's a wonder he didn't set the d-dog on me!"

Miss Dem chuckled.

"That's Billy M. to a T," she told him. "He thinks that makin' a whisper like cold feet will take a slice off the price. He wants your films all right. There was only one deal I know of when he didn't kick at the admission fee—and that was once when little Billy, Jr., got lost, strayed, and stolen all in a bunch."

Jimmy shook his head. What Miss Dem said was quite unbelievable to him. He felt the bitterness of defeat after months of hard work.

As they passed through the little house at the gate a stout man came up to them.

"Want a job?" he asked of the Hot Dog.

"I don't care," the inventor returned listlessly.

"We're short a general utility man," the stout man went on, "and any one that comes with Miss Dem here——"

"None of your flattery, John!" Miss Dem said, twinkling at him.

The short of it was that the Hot Dog, dampened of his hopes for a fortune, condescended to a job and wages.

When they got outside Miss Dem turned to Jimmy Squires with a smile.

"I told you Morisson was going to lower the price on you, didn't I?"

"I'd sell it cheap—" he began.

"Exactly!" Miss Dem observed gleefully. "He told John to offer you the job so he could keep his eye on you."

"Huh!" Squires exclaimed disgustedly. "That proves nothing."

"Well," Miss Dem observed sagely, "if I know B. M., he's goin' to get you on the dollar-ninety-eight table before he's through with you."

NEARLY a week passed before Miss Dem met the inventor again. It seemed that Morisson was still inclined to doubt, yet at the same time was loath to let Squires out of his sight lest he should really have something of value. So Morisson had given some of the fire-proofed films to his own chemist, Falworth, to test.

Meanwhile, the inventor stayed about the plant engaged in light duties at a fair wage. He began to lose his haggard look, eating and sleeping more, and continually hoping that the matter would be decided, and that Morisson would buy his invention at a good figure.

Miss Dem found Jimmy Squires and Falworth together at the studio. They had grown very friendly. The chemist talked entertainingly—or rather he listened entertainingly, with an occasional word to draw the Hot Dog out. He was a dull, sleepy-looking man, with heavy-lidded eyes, and he moved with unexpected swiftness for a stout man. Miss Dem had never liked Falworth, but Morisson banked on him.

He slid away as Miss Dem approached, with a languid nod and a backward look over his shoulder.

"How goes it?" she asked of the Hot Dog.

"F-first-rate!" he returned enthusiastically. "I think Mr. M-Morisson is going to buy. Falworth is very kindly trying to interest him. I've explained things to him, and he thinks it's a bully invention if it will work under all conditions. He's testing the films in all sorts of ways. Just now he has put some in a safe, and if they stand a time test there, stowed away under conditions that would explode ordinary celluloid, why, my fortune's made!"

He beamed on Miss Dem with his parti-colored eyes, adding—

"Falworth has been dandy to me!"

Miss Dem shrugged her shoulders.

"I never cottoned to Falworth," she said. "Don't tell him too much, Jimmy."

The Hot Dog looked down at his boots.

"Have you?" she asked anxiously.

"I—I've told him all he wanted to know," he admitted. "What else c-could I do?"

Miss Dem shook her head disapprovingly.

"You're d-dead wrong," he protested. "Falworth is as m-much interested in this thing as I am m-myself."

"And a trifle more so," Miss Dem announced dryly.

The Hot Dog threw back his head and laughed his high, hooting laugh, which always sounded like a man out of practise, he used it so seldom.

Before she could say more, Falworth came back to ask the inventor's help in some adjustment.

"Take it from me," he drawled to Miss Dem, laying his hand on the Hot Dog's arm, "Jim has a big thing here, and he's going to soak the old man all the traffic will bear."

They walked off together, Falworth taking little soft steps to Jim Squires' ungainly stride, and gesticulating with his small fat hands as they went.

Miss Dem looked after them down the corridor. She felt vaguely uneasy. As they disappeared, she shook herself vexedly.

"You suspicious old fool," she said aloud to herself, "your liver's off. Go home and get a pill."

It was late that night. Miss Dem stood at the door of her apartments and fumbling in her black bag, discovered the loss of the key to the spring lock. She remembered hearing something drop as she talked with Jimmy Squires that afternoon, but a search had revealed nothing.

Now it was too late to get a locksmith, and she meditated upon the nearest woman's hotel that would take her in at this hour of the night.

She had already turned away from the door and begun to descend the stairs, when it occurred to her that "Angel-face" must be fed at all cost. He had heard her step, and was sniffing and whimpering at the crack under the door.

That settled it. She stooped to reassure him with a word of comfort, and started out for the Morisson studio. She knew the watchman would let her in even at this unheard-of hour.

So vigorously slamming her luck in the choicest vocabulary she could muster, she ran downstairs, and hurrying a bit, managed to catch the car at the corner.

As she walked up the street to the Morisson plant a man came hurrying in the opposite direction, nearly running her down. He was muffled in an overcoat, the collar turned up about his ears, and his cap jammed down to meet it. He moved swiftly, making no sound on the pavement.

Even in her haste Miss Dem glanced around after him, she hardly knew why. There was something familiar in his movement.

If it is difficult to gain entrance to a photo-plant in the daytime, it is doubly, triply so at night, as Miss Dem presently discovered.

Steve, the watchman at the gate, after permitting her to ring a while, opened the door a cautious inch or two, immensely astonished to behold her.

He was dubious about letting her in. He refused flatly at first. But when she told him of her predicament, he began to soften.

No, he had seen nothing of a lost key—no one had turned it in. Very reluctantly he opened the door and grudgingly allowed her to step inside. Yes, he supposed she could go and hunt for it.

"Here, Joe," he called, "take Miss Dem up into the studio. She's lost a key."

A man appeared with a night-light.

Miss Dem followed him across the courtyard, up the stairs, into the studio building. He flashed his spark into the dark hall and, finding the electric switch, flooded the place with light.

There is no place more lonely at night than the place which is well peopled in the daytime. Miss Dem missed at every turn the voices, the sound of activity, the jolly presence of the movie people who crowded the studios in the daylight. It seemed almost as if they had left the echo of their voices behind them to mock at the silence.

Miss Dem made her way through the big empty spaces to the place where she had stood talking with the Hot Dog.

"It was round here somewhere," she told the man. "I heard it drop then, but couldn't see anything of it, and I didn't miss the key till a little while ago."

The man touched every switch till the place was ablaze with light. She stooped and looked carefully about on the floor.

There came a sudden frightful noise—a shock, as if the air had been sucked out of the room—a tinkle of broken glass—a patter of things falling—an acrid smell.

Miss Dem, half dazed, picked herself up and stared about her.

A thick cloud hung in the air. Through it she saw dimly a safe rent by an explosion, its door open. The combination dial hurtled through the air and landed spinning on the floor. Smoke and fire issued from the split safe. Everywhere little heaps of film burst into flame where they fell.

The watchman went leaping across the big room and down the hall to turn in the alarm.

Miss Dem straightened her hat, choking on the smoke.

Joe rushed back again with other men in his train. They carried fire-hose and axes. The lonely room of a moment before became the center of seething activity. The pale electric light was dyed rose-color with the mounting flames. Came the splash of water, the hiss of resisting fire, the rise of white steam.

Then with a sudden rushing crescendo of sound, the regular firemen arrived.

Lines of black hose writhed over the floor like serpents of deliverance.

Miss Dem stepped back out of the way, right onto her lost key. So is it tolerably sure that one will find just about what one isn't looking for. She tucked it joyfully into her purse and made for the stairway, murmuring to herself:

"This here is no place for pettiskirts!"

She ran through the courtyard, dodging the firemen and the hose-lines.

Half-way to the St. Peter's gate-house a man grabbed her arm and turned her face to the light. It was Steve, the watchman who had let her in. He was pale as ashes, and his hand shook on her arm.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed, and, turning, walked with her to the gate and to the edge of the dense crowd which had gathered outside. "I'd never have forgiven myself if anything had happened to you, Miss Dem, after I let you in. I'm generally more strict —you were the second one I let in to-night. Don't tell any one. I'd get into trouble."

"Keep movin'!" a policeman bade them, shouting to be heard over the din of arriving engines and clanging bells.

Miss Dem gave Steve a gentle push.

"Run along back, Steve!" she said in his ear. "I'm goin' home to have a nap before breakfast."

She disentangled herself from the pushing crowd, skipped over a pathway of red-hot cinders trailing from a passing engine, and ran for the car.

Arrived at home—this time with the key —she filled Angel-face to the muzzle with puppy-biscuit, and retired to rest.

IN THE morning, drawn by a not unnatural curiosity, she went to the Morisson plant. The place was buzzing like a beehive. Every employe who could get in, whether by hook or by crook, was there surveying the damage.

The room where the explosion had taken place still smelled acrid with the burned-out flames. Water had soaked the floor. It ran in little rivulets in every direction. Bits of charred paper lay about. The thin partition wall gaped where a fragment of iron had hurtled through. On the floor, here and there, was the sticky detritus of burnt film lying where it fell when the explosion blew it out of the safe.

"Lord!" Miss Dem exclaimed. "What a mess!"

Falworth and Mr. Morisson passed in close conversation. The latter was saying: "Too bad! I was banking on that!"

"Well," the chemist returned with a wave of his fat white hand, "we gave him the best possible chance."

They passed out of sight into the movie man's private office.

Miss Dem stood looking after them. Some one touched her arm. Steve stood beside her. He looked nervous and worried.

"Say, Miss Dem," he began in a low tone, "you haven't told any one you were in here last night, have you?"

"Was I hatched yesterday?" she retorted with a smile.

Steve looked relieved.

"No one else knows but Joe—the man who took you up," he told her. "I got him his job—he won't snitch."

"How about the other person you let in last night?" she asked him in a sudden curiosity.

Steve looked blank. He shook his head.

"You were the only one got past me," he declared.

"Oh, I thought—" she began, trying to piece something together in her mind.

Steve leaned toward her.

"I can rely on you not to get me into trouble, Miss Dem," he whispered, as a couple of employees passed them. "I'd be bounced if it got to Mr. Morisson's ears that I——"

She put out her hand and grasped his

heartily as it were man to man. "Trust me to the boneyard, Steve!" she reassured him. "I wasn't here last night. That's the final word on it!"

Steve's face cleared.

"You're all right!" he declared, and turning, went downstairs to his post.

Left to herself, Miss Dem wandered around, wondering at the amount of damage a single explosion could wreak. Everybody was talking at once. A workman was telling a group of new arrivals his version of the event. He pointed out the gaping safe at the end of the room.

"It started in that there safe," he said. "Some fil-ums they was testin' blowed up and done all the mischief. Mr. Morisson he says he won't try no more fil-ums unless they're *warranted* to bust up. These here was fire-proof fil-ums. He's tried a lot of 'em, and you can't never depend on 'em."

Miss Dem turned away with a pang of pity for the Hot Dog. They had been his films after all. And if so, here was the end of his dreams of a fortune—for the present at least.

As she went out through the gate she ran into the Hot Dog himself. His hat was pulled down over his eyes, his hands were thrust deep into his pockets.

"Hello, Jimmy!" she accosted him more cheerfully than she felt. "Have you been in yet?"

She wagged her head toward the building she had just quitted. He lifted despairing eyes and looked at her.

"N-no," he answered. "Falworth advised me to k-keep out of the old man's way. He's furious at me."

"The deuce he is!" she commented sympathetically.

"How c-could I tell they'd blow up in the safe?" he mourned. "I kept a couple of them in my old safe under every possible test for weeks before I took them to Mr. Morisson."

"What did Falworth say?" she asked him.

The Hot Dog smiled wearily.

"Oh, Falworth was all right. He said he was awfully disappointed. He gave me the best chance he could—the run of his own private laboratory while he was trying the films out. He even let me keep my notes in his safe for fear some one would crib them before I got my patent out. Oh, he was dead sure it would c-come out all right, Miss Dem. He's as much disappointed as I am that the n-notes and all blew up," Jimmy finished warmly. The memory of Falworth's friendship seemed at this tragic moment to be a comfort to him.

Miss Dem opened her mouth to speak, then shut it with a snap. So the notes had gone too. If that was the case——

She bade Jimmy good-by, wished him better luck to come and went on down the street. What double-barreled idiots the two men had been—to put Jimmy's precious notes in with the films! A jackass in its dotage would have known better. But surely some scraps must have survived the flames. Why hadn't Jimmy thought of that? He was too sodden with disappointment, she supposed.

And with the thought she turned on her heel and started briskly back. It was not too late for him to try and hunt them. But when she got to the plant the Hot Dog had vanished.

Miss Dem glanced at the watch on her wrist. She had a little time to spare—if she went without lunch. This time she had hard work to gain admittance, privileged character though she was. It was only after a direct appeal to Mr. Morisson himself, via the 'phone on Steve's desk, that the door swung open, and she crossed the courtyard on the run, followed by the envious glances of the crowd that still lingered outside.

She ran up the stairs and into the big studio room. The insurance agents had inspected the damage. Already the mess was being cleared. Even the panes of broken glass had been swept up, and nowhere on the floor could she find a scrap of the precious paper she sought!

She grabbed a passing workman, shaking his arm in her earnestness.

"Where's all that stuff from off the floor?" she asked breathlessly.

He shook his head.

"Search me," he adjured her pleasantly. "I ain't got it in me pockets."

"Who took it away?"

"Dunno," the man returned, and went his way.

Miss Dem wandered into the next room whose wall had been rent by the explosion. A man was shoveling débris from the floor —plaster and splintered wood. An idea came to Miss Dem. This, too, would go its way to the rubbish heap. So she sat down and waited.

Presently the man finished, and flinging down his shovel trundled his wheelbarrow down the hall to regions unknown, closely followed, not to say pursued, by Miss Dem. He steered his course to the nearest freight elevator and waited till the man in charge flung the door open.

Miss Dem hopped on as impudently as a sparrow.

"Git off!" the elevator man ordered truculently.

"When we get to the bottom," Miss Dem agreed placidly.

"Where d'you think you're goin'?" he asked sarcastically.

Miss Dem sighed portentously.

"I'm on my way to th' dump-heap," she announced. "Don't stop me!"

Both men guffawed. Number one trundled his barrow on to the elevator. Number two slapped to the door and pulled the wire rope. He turned and surveyed his extra passenger.

"Say, you must be Miss Dem, ain't you?"

"One shot, one hit," she answered briefly. "I am."

"I guess Mr. Morisson won't mind if I do give you a ride then," he ventured.

Every one in the plant knew the story of Miss Dem's part in the recovery of the little Morisson boy, and of his father's gratitude to her.

The dump-heap proved to be in the rear of the engine-house—such a mountain of rubbish, that it seemed useless to hunt for anything in it. But Miss Dem peeled off her coat, rolled up her sleeves, and got to work, sneezing as the dust of the plaster sifted up under her busy hands. But though she sought long and valiantly, not one scrap of Jimmy's precious notes came to light.

She pondered the matter deeply on her way home. It seemed extraordinary that not one tiny bit—not one infinitesimal fragment—not one scrawling note in the Hot Dog's peculiar writing—should have escaped the flames.

And, by the way, not one bit of the films themselves, although in the sticky remnant she had made out the selvedge of some with the name of Morisson's own mark. But none of the Half Moon Company's films.

Something flitted across Miss Dem's consciousness and was gone. Then in the busy afternoon which ensued she forgot everything else, and it was not till weeks afterward that she recaptured the half-fledged suspicion and knew it for what it was.

IT WAS some time later that, passing near the Morisson plant, she walked into the little St. Peter house at the gate to have a chat with Steve.

"What's the news?" she asked, leaning her elbows comfortably on the high counter.

"Nothing much— Oh, yes! Mr. Morisson has gone in for another fire-proof film."

"Suffering kittens!" was Miss Dem's comment. "I thought it was never-again-so-help-me for him."

"So it was," Steve admitted. "But this is Falworth's own invention. Mr. Morisson has a lot of confidence in him."

"Humph!" Miss Dem exclaimed. "That's more than I have."

"Same here," Steve said significantly.

"Where's Jimmy Squires?" she asked abruptly.

"Oh, he got bounced a week ago," Steve informed her. "And though I couldn't put my finger on it," he added in a low tone, "I've a notion Mr. Falworth had something to do with it."

"I shouldn't be shocked to death with surprise to hear it," she commented dryly. "I've even fancied he knew more about that explosion than anybody else knew."

"Well," Steve remarked eagerly, "I wondered that night why he came——"

He stopped short, biting his lip as if he had said more than he intended.

Into Miss Dem's mind flashed the picture of a dark street, and a man bundled up in an overcoat, and walking with soft, mincing steps, and, with the picture, Steve's words just after the fire, "You're the second one I let in tonight."

A sudden determination struck her.

"Steve," she said, "I want to see Mr. Falworth."

Steve shook his head.

"He left five minutes ago—for Washington. He's gone to register his patent."

Miss Dem smote one fist on the other palm. With feminine unreason she would have sworn that Falworth had stolen the Hot Dog's invention, and had gone to make it his own. Yet she realized that she had only the slenderest evidence to go on—evidence that would count nothing before a court of law. As she stood there she put it succinctly to herself, while Steve looked curiously at her without a word.

Falworth's case, briefly stated, was this: He had put the films and Jimmy's data into the safe for a final test—the latter, as he told Jimmy, by mistake, since they belonged in another safe. Before morning they had blown the door out of the safe, doing a lot of damage and completely destroying every vestige of the Hot Dog's records of the process of fireproofing. Falworth had professed sorrow for the loss, but he pointed out to the inventor that in the face of what had happened the notes were valueless. And Jimmy had accepted his view of the case with humiliation and chagrin.

The case of the Hot Dog was compounded of "ifs" and "buts," hardly a proven statement in the whole, only suspicions, might - have - beens, possibilities. The strongest was the visit of Falworth to the plant late at night when no one was about to keep tabs on anything he chose to do. Yet that fact was not hers to exploit since the telling of it would involve an explanation of her own presence there, and Steve's disregard of the rules. That no scrap either of the Hot Dog's notes nor of his films had survived was the second suspicious circumstance. The third had just come to light—Falworth's success with a fire-proof film, after many failures. Would such flimsy evidence count with anybody but herself? And yet——

She drew little circles in the dust of Steve's floor with the point of her umbrella.

"Well," she said at last, with a sigh, "I must crank up. Good-by!"

She walked slowly to the corner, prepared to take the car uptown. But possessed by an unusual vacillation, she let two whiz past, and then calling herself a few hard names, she boarded a car going in the other direction, bound for the region where the Hot Dog lived.

He answered her characteristic bang on the door with a "Hello, n-neighbor!" and swept a tottering pile of rubbish off a chair that she might sit down.

Miss Dem saw at once that he was on the track of invention—he looked contented, and whistled between his teeth in a way he had when he was thinking deeply.

"I'm getting on the t-trail of that fireproof again," he told her happily. "And if it blows up this t-time, I'll b-blow up with it!"

Miss Dem drew a long breath.

"Jimmy," she said, "I have never believed it did blow up that night." She talked at close range, looking into his face with compelling earnestness. "If any one told you so, it was a lie, or a big mistake—I don't care which."

He gazed at her in utter astonishment. His whistling stopped short.

"I never found a bit of your notes or your film in the waste-pile afterward, though I searched it through and through," she went on. "Surely there would have been some remnant for identification. If you had been there you would have seen that the films that blew up were Morisson films—not the Half Moon that you used. That was why Falworth warned you not to go in. He knew you'd see too much!"

"I don't believe it!" Jimmy declared. "I'll go ask Falworth!"

He snatched his hat off the hook and started for the door in his impetuous fashion.

"Falworth has gone!" She barred his way, holding him by the lapel of his old serge coat with her strong, clever-looking hands. "He has started for Washington just now to register his patent for a fireproof film."

"Ah!" Jimmy exclaimed, as if some one had run against him and forced it out of him. There was anguish in the tone. "H-he wouldn't——"

"Wouldn't he?" she scoffed.

His face took on an obstinate look.

"It's all fudge!" he fumed.

Miss Dem helped herself to a long breath and murmured something about patience.

"See here, Jimmy Squires," she said in a matter-of-fact way that somehow compelled his attention, "inventors' skulls are filled up with brains and cotton-wool. That's why they're poor as mud. You're thinking with the cotton-wool just now. Listen! You told Falworth everything about your invention, didn't you?"

The Hot Dog nodded thoughtfully, not to say regretfully.

"You even gave him charge of every last note on the subject, didn't you?"

Again he nodded.

"Take it all in all, there's nothing to prevent him from stealing your work and passing it off as his own, is there?"

"N-no," reluctantly.

"Then the only thing that stands between you and that theft is whatever common honesty Falworth possesses. Tell me," she went on thirstily, "you know some instances of his slickness in small matters, as well as I do. Does Falworth strike you as a glorified spirit in any sense?"

The Hot Dog snickered.

"N-no," he admitted, "I c-can't s-say he does."

"Then you grant the possibility," she urged.

The Hot Dog flung himself about exasperatedly.

"Oh, anything is possible," he admitted unwillingly, "b-but—oh, you d-don't know Falworth!"

"Jimmy Squires," she told him solemnly, "we'll both know him better soon."

He looked at her inquiringly.

"As your guardian angel, I'm going to take you by the scruff of the neck and deliver you at the Patent Office at Washington by the next train. Come on!"

She urged him toward the door as she spoke. And such was the compelling force of her magnetism and his own bewilderment that he followed her like a pet sparrow down the stairs into the street, having just sense enough remaining to close the door of the taxi behind them as they jumped into it at the corner.

This extravagance was not needed, it turned out, for they had to wait an hour at the station before the next train went. During that time Miss Dem made a few pungent remarks about inventors being the easiest marks. "The original gold-bricked rubes from way-back-and-sit-down-ville," as she called them.

By the time the train pulled out, the Hot Dog was reduced to meekness and willing to do anything Miss Dem should suggest, though he still clung devotedly to his belief in Falworth. He consoled himself by conjuring up Miss Dem's chagrin when she found herself in the wrong at the end of their wild and ridiculous journey.

They went on the run through the marble aisles of the magnificent Washington station, and skipped into a taxi.

Miss Dem was out almost before it stopped at the Patent Office. She dashed up the steps, smiling grimly to think how unsuspecting Jimmy would take it when he met the false friend there—Falworth could not be much ahead of them, and though she was hazy on the subject, she fancied registering a patent, took time.

But alas, for human conjecture! When the very slow official looked the matter up, they learned that Falworth had come and gone.

As to Falworth's formula for the registered invention, it was impossible for them to get even as much as a glimpse of it. It might have been line for line Jimmy's own process—it might instead have been made up on entirely different lines. And lacking that knowledge they found themselves as much at sea as ever. Was Falworth playing false? Was he playing fair? They knew no more than before they came to Washington.

When they left the building Jimmy was drooping. Presently he collapsed on a doorstep, his face a pale green in color. It transpired that he had had nothing to eat that day.

Miss Dem, cursing herself for a meddlesome idiot, supported him to the nearest restaurant, where she filled him up with all he could hold, telling him for his pride's sake that he could pay her back later, and that she would tack on six per cent. for the accommodation.

All through the meal she chattered gaily. But she was in the dumps. She had wasted time and money to learn nothing.

IT WAS in a baffled mood they climbed aboard the express for home. Jimmy still stubbornly stuck to his belief in Falworth, and was inclined to sulk because of the loss of the afternoon's work. Miss Dem, too, glowered when she thought of the thousand and one things she had left undone to "hunt rabbits' wings," her equivalent for the wildest kind of wild-goose chase.

As the train slid along she devoted herself to the manufacture of good resolutions for the future. After all, people had to learn their own lessons—to put sticking-plaster on their own scratches. As for the Hot Dog——

A jar of the brakes that set wheel grinding on track—a terrific crash! Then everything inside the car seemed to come close and topple over.

Miss Dem picked herself up from the wreckage of seats and looked about for her companion.

He had catapulted across the aisle. When he met her gaze he crawled cautiously on hands and knees toward her, an expression of surprise on his face that made Miss Dem burst out laughing, despite the seriousness of the moment.

All about them the passengers were scrambling to their feet. They were in various stages of panic—some in the cold stun that comes just before yelling.

There was a rush for the doors. They were jammed. One heard glass breaking, voices raised appealingly, terrifiedly, in commands that no one heeded.

Jimmy wrenched free the little red-handled ax that always looks so silly when the train is spinning safely along. He battered a way through the nearest window and helped keep order when the rush came for the exit.

Miss Dem, as she climbed through, felt as if the whole thing had happened a hundred times before. Jimmy Squires dropped to the ground beside her, and finding her in no need of assistance ran forward to offer his services to the conductor. He was a helpful soul, was the Hot Dog, and glad to do something to keep his mind from the gamut of unpleasant thoughts that had engaged it for the last few hours.

Miss Dem, moving here and there, helping where and whom she could, saw a fat man carried out of the smoker. He was groaning horribly, and one arm hung limp in the sleeve of his overcoat. She caught a glimpse of his chalky white face. It was Falworth.

Quickly she turned and followed, while they laid him on the grass by the ditch. She sat down near by, and watched the doctor set and bind his arm in an impromptu sling. He still gave vent to blood-curdling groans, so that a little boy who had stood trembling quietly till then—rent the air with terrified screams.

The doctor gave an exclamation of impatience. He bent over Falworth with an air of determination.

"See here," he said, "you've only an arm broke. Try and control yourself."

But Falworth groaned all the louder.

Miss Dem's lip curled. Nevertheless, since he seemed to be in pain, she stooped over him after the doctor moved on, and drew his overcoat closer about his broken arm. As she did so a roll of papers slid out of the pocket.

All shapes and sizes and colors they were. And over them went scrawlings like the footprints of an ink-spider on a jag—the familiar fist of Jimmy Squires.

With an exclamation of amazement, Miss Dem slipped them into her own pocket. Falworth opened his eyes.

"What—you!" he ejaculated, starting with unpleased surprise.

"Yes," she answered quietly, "Jimmy Squires and I came down to register his invention of fire-proof film." She watched him narrowly.

He started in good earnest. "Why—his film was no good. It blew up the safe. No one would look at his patent after that!"

"Oh," Miss Dem remarked thoughtfully. "So it did blow up—and his notes too?"

Falworth raised himself to a sitting posture, propping his back against a fence.

"Yes, his notes went too," he told her. "But they wouldn't have been any good to him. No one would have touched any film on that formula."

Miss Dem felt a hand on her shoulder. Jimmy had come up behind her. It was plain from the expression of his face that he had heard Falworth's words, and felt hurt at the matter-of-fact tone in which he said them.

Miss Dem held out the little bundle of notes to him without a word.

He stared at it a moment in utter unbelief, then snatched it from her with a cry of joy.

"My notes! Where did you get them?"

Before she could answer, Falworth sprang forward and all but wrenched them out of his hands, then fell back with a cry of pain.

Then and there Jimmy wrung the truth out of Falworth, and in the heart-searching talk that followed, Miss Dem paused in sheer admiration occasionally, to hear the choice line of invective the Hot Dog, who was by this time very hot indeed, got off in extracting the sullen answers from the man who had deceived and robbed him.

While they had it out, with the doctors hurrying to and fro, and the wreck-scarred people all about them, Miss Dem on her own initiative prepared a statement. It read thus:

"I, Joseph Falworth, declare to all parties interested, that I did wilfully and deceitfully, for my own gain, discredit the invention of James Squires for non-combustible film; and did divert the same to my own advantage, using his notes for registration at the Patent Office in Washington this day (November 10, 19—). I now declare that the invention of the said James Squires is—"

here a particularly solid passer-by trod on Miss Dem's toe, and in the subsequent anguish she dropped the superior legal style, and finished hastily—"all it was cracked up to be."

She leaned toward Falworth and thrust a pencil into his hand.

"Sign this in your best writin'!" she commanded.

Falworth glanced at it, and purpled with rage.

"The —— I will!" he mouthed huskily.

Miss Dem sat back on her heels, prepared to fight the matter to a finish.

But the Hot Dog, stowing his precious notes away, and buttoning his coat over them, caught the paper out of Miss Dem's hand and read it.

"Good!" he commented, and shoved a lean fist under Falworth's nose.

"I may be a bum b-business m-man," he observed, "b-but I'll push your nose b-back into your c-collar-button if you don't sign this!"

These honeyed words induced Falworth, shaking with nervousness over the past revelation and the wreck, to come up to time. He scrawled his name viciously and threw the paper and pencil at Jimmy in a rage.

"There! —— you!" he snarled, and turned his back on them both.

It was late that night when they got home. Over a peppery oyster stew they talked jubilantly of Jimmy's new prospects.

Then Miss Dem pushed her plate away, and leaning both elbows comfortably on the table, surveyed the Hot Dog in a speculative way that made him smile. In fancy she beheld him, a wealthy inventor, established in a fine house, and married to a nice girl. Mentally she ran over all the pleasantest girls she knew, till she happened on the right one.

She rose, triumph in her eye, and tapped the object of her matrimonial schemes on the arm.

"I must get on home, Jimmy," she said. "Run in tomorrow at five and take tea with me—I might have a friend in to meet you."

The YEARS BETWEEN

by GEORGE L. CATTON

"SUM CRAB" waited.

For twenty years Sum Crab sat in the sand all Summer and picked out the pin-points of gold that came down the river with the running ice in the Spring. For twenty years she sat there in front of her cabin and stopped every man that came up the Porcupine.

"You see um Sundy?" she would ask, and always the prospector, chechako or sourdough, would reply—

"Who's Sundy?"

"Sundy," she would answer, pulling out a strand of her greasy hair, "um huir gold."

Then, if the traveler attempted to question her further, she merely grunted. If he persisted, she raved. And curse! Stringy Yolles, the oldest trapper in Fort Yukon, said she had a worse tongue than any man he had ever heard.

"Whoever taught her English," he would say, "must have taught her with a dog-whip." Then, as he turned away, he would add as an afterthought, "And he didn't use no Bible neither."

So, as no one knew her name, and she resented every question asked her, they nicknamed her "Sum Crab."

When she had been there ten years she

ceased to be just a squaw and became a landmark, a measure of miles.

When she had been there twenty years the boys at the Fort began to speculate on the amount of gold she had accumulated in that time. That she had a big boxful, as Bull Morgan, the "ne'er do anything if he could avoid it," asserted, was disputed vigorously by Stringy Yolles.

"A big boxful!" Stringy snorted. "Did you ever try to pick white pepper out of black? A big boxful! Why, I'll bet every trap I spring this Winter coming that that little bean-tinful she gives me every Fall to buy her Winter's grub is her whole Summer's picking."

Bull Morgan got angry.

"I'm a liar, eh!" he snarled. "You don't think I seen it?"

"When?" Stringy Yolles ran his gnarled fingers through his long white beard and smiled unbelievingly.

"Last Summer," Bull Morgan replied, assuming an aggrieved expression. "I was coming down at night, and I seen a light in her window, so I sneaks over and peeks in, and I seen it. She was sitting on her heels in the corner beside a big box, and putting in what she had picked out that day, and she was a-talking to herself all the time. Then she looks up and spots me, and bangs down the lid. I didn't waste no time getting away, but I seen it all right, and I'll bet she's got two hundred pounds of gold in that box."

Stringy Yolles laughed.

"Don't it beat the devil what whisky will make a man see?" he said.

Still, quite a few believed Bull Morgan. It seemed quite possible that she could have filled a good-sized box in twenty years. Twenty years is a long, long time to sit in the sand and pick "white pepper out of black," and wait for Sundy. Twenty years is about the length of time a gray fox lives.

Sum Crab waited. Twenty years Sum Crab sat in the sand and waited for Sandy. And Sandy came back.

THE first time Sandy Dewar paddled up the Porcupine he was working for the American Government; that was twenty years ago, and Sandy was twenty-one years an infant, full of wild-oat germs, and red-headed.

There were five other men in the surveying party, all with a greater weight of years, experience, and knowledge of the country on their shoulders and in and under their long, dark hair. So when the night began to shut down on daylight at three in the afternoon, and the blue smoke from the camp-fires hung low, as if loath to leave the comfort of the flames, they made preparation to stay the Winter at an Indian encampment.

Sandy was green, a tenderfoot, antagonistic. Sandy had danced through his first handful of years in Seattle. He protested vigorously.

"What's fifty below when your underwear's an inch thick?" he demanded sarcastically. "What's six feet of snow to snowshoes; and wolves—puh! You've got cold feet, that's what's the matter with you!"

"You'd sooner eat frozen beans and sleep in a bag?" Stringy Yolles asked. "You'd sooner face five months without a bath than stick your nose in a hot pot of tinned beef and kick your boots off every night? For why?"

"For why?" Sandy got up off his seat and banged his fist down on the table. "For why?" he repeated. "Do you s'pose I want to stay another year in this tail-end of God's graveyard? What in blazes do you think I am? For why!"

He picked up his tin plate and flung it through the window.

"What's out there?" he roared. "Hills and rocks and rivers and trees, mud and sand and water and snow, day that's half night, and a handful of bow-bow, yap-yap Indians! Indians? Half-starved, crawling, tail-between-your-legs race of nearly human dogs with one set of brains to a whole —— dozen! For why!"

He sneered the phrase again, as if he had been called upon to answer a fool's question, then he jerked his coat off and threw it on the floor.

"Come on outside where there's room and I'll show you for why! Come on, the whole —— five of you!"

Stringy Yolles poured himself another cup of coffee. The other four men laid down their knives and looked at Stringy, but Stringy let him get away with it. Stringy had taught himself all he knew by the laborious process of two and two make four, and two make six; and one of the lessons he had learned, had studied out as he made his lonely rounds of his circles of traps, was that the temper display of ignorance calls for the other man's silence.

Sandy was young; this was his first trip out of civilization; he had much to learn. The other four men understood and went on with their dinners, with a greater respect for Stringy, and a smile of contempt on their faces for Sandy. Sandy boiled over.

"You—you yellow curs!" he stuttered. "You'll sit here all Winter and rot! You'll keep me here when—when——"

Sandy was speechless. The other men kept on eating.

Tears, half of rage, disappointment, and infantile self-pity, and half of mortification at those tears coming, sprang into Sandy's eyes, and he turned away to look out of the window. Stringy winked across the table.

"Pass the ginger!" he said.

The other men smiled. Slowly, very slowly Sandy turned around again and studied Stringy's expressionless face. There was no ginger north of Fort Yukon. Sandy understood, and the understanding showed him his childishness.

"Down home," he growled almost apologetically, "in Seattle, my friends are going into the Washington Theater with their best girls on their arms, and a sirloin steak on top of a gin rickey in their stomachs; and here am I——"

He strode to the door and, swinging it open, banged it behind him. Stringy pushed his plate back and lighted his pipe.

"Some day, some foreigner's going to stick a knife in Sandy's back in the dark," he prophesied.

Sandy came back an hour later, and without a word threw himself on his bunk. He was disgusted. The bracing air and the first crisp snowfall had sent the hot blood back into his head and restored his self-estimation. He did not know the country like the other men did; he really imagined they were fearful of the cold.

The silent contempt of a moral man for a coward sent a sneer into his face, a sneer that ground permanent wrinkles in both sides of his upper lip before he finally parted company with them. He grew taciturn and moody; and as the night snailed farther out over the day, and the vicious swish of the snow on the window accentuated the sleepy monotony of one meal a day and two in the darkness; of a serial card-game and a conversation that consisted mostly of raised eyebrows and quiet gestures of shoulders and hands, Sandy found their lazy company unbearable.

He got to mixing more with the Indians. One night he brought in Noatuk, old Pekue Pahe's daughter.

"She's the most intelligent-looking animal in the pack," he explained lamely. "I've tried to learn their yelping, and can't, so I'm going to teach this one to talk human."

Stringy Yolles looked at him for a moment; stared him straight in the eyes with a silent question between his half-closed lids, then he opened his own private bag and laid a Bible in Noatuk's lap.

"It's plain English," he said, "and it's human."

Sandy reddened, but he said nothing; Stringy had left nothing that he could say.

Noatuk learned fast. In two weeks she knew the English names of everything in the shack, and could count up to twenty. In a month she could repeat the alphabet an hour after Sandy had given it to her, and sing the chorus of "Home, Sweet Home" if one of them would start it for her.

Then Sandy began to teach her words as they were spelled and pronounced. He ran into an obstruction immediately. Try as she might and did, Noatuk could not say A, she always got it U. At first Sandy smiled at her soft accent, but as her inability to correct the fault became more apparent, he lost patience at what he termed her dogged obstinacy.

"Sunt Pull!" he mimicked her, his shallow temper riled. "Murk and Muttu, John the Buptist! Bah! bark it! Spit it out on the floor, and I'll read it!"

Noatuk hung her head. She did not know what he was saying, but she knew he was angry at her for something she could not help. And Stringy would frown, but he never said anything.

One day Noatuk laid her finger on the first line of the first verse of Genesis.

"In the beginning, God—" she articulated slowly. "Who um God?"

That was too much for Sandy; he turned her over to Stringy for an answer to that question. And Stringy told her. So when Christmas came, Noatuk vaguely understood why they decorated the shack with green spruce, and when Sandy insisted on her coming in to the extra spread they prepared for dinner, she thought she knew the reason for that too.

"It's part of her ed-e-cation," as Sandy said it, but Noatuk thought — Noatuk smiled up into Sandy's face when he heaped her plate with steaming salmon.

"Thunk you!" she said, and her little brown face smiled all afternoon because he patted her hand.

ALL through January and February Noatuk came and sat with Sandy by the fire, repeating after him and memorizing English words and phrases. When he patted her on the shoulder for approval she would clap her hands and laugh. When he raved and swore at her for mistakes she would hang her head and wait till he became calm again.

Sandy gave up trying to make her pronounce her A's and forgot about it till she started to call him Sunday—her pronunciation of Sandy—instead of "U," as she had done since she first began coming in; then he got furious. It gave the others an opportunity to joke at his expense.

"Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, they come but once a week," Stringy Yolles sang, "and Thursday, Friday, Saturday, but once; yet every day that passes the whole long Winter through, oh—every day it's Sunday with the dunce."

"Sing, fool!" Sandy roared. "Go on, show your backwoods ignorance! That's a —— of a way to show the white man's superior intelligence! Go on, sing, she understands that you are trying to make a fool of her!"

Stringy Yolles grinned.

"Maybe she does, Sandy," he replied. "She's learning so fast that I wouldn't be surprised if she knew more cuss words than prayers; and, as I remarked to Bill here this morning, she's sure the model student of the Sunday-school class."

Sandy jumped to his feet.

"You—you—you long slab of tan-bark!" he fumed. "You frizzled-out strip of lean bacon; you'll sit there and poke fun at me; you'll——"

Stringy interrupted.

"When she looks up at you, Sandy," he went on as if he had not heard Sandy's raging, "any one would think by the expression of her face that it was the sunlight that dazzled her eyes. And when we are gone—don't forget that, Sandy—when we leave here for good, she's going to get cross-eyed from stopping on Wednesday to look both ways for Sunday."

A surprised look crept into Sandy's flushed face and he turned slowly to look at the Indian girl. Noatuk was crying. Sandy forgot his rage in what, to him, was the aimless rambling of a fool's imagination.

"What!" he ejaculated, amused. "That in love with me? Well I'll be ——!"

Stringy Yolles frowned.

"It's a fact, Sandy," he said, but Sandy would not believe it.

Every day Stringy managed somehow to remind him of it, and at the same time to impress upon him the fact that soon he would be leaving her for good. Sandy only smiled and shook his head.

But as the days began to lengthen out and the snow grew heavy under foot, Noatuk's mistake became more pronounced; Sandy realized at last that Stringy was right. Noatuk came earlier in the day and stayed longer, and if Sandy allowed her to go out at night without accompanying her he noticed that she laughed but little the next day, and took no interest in her studies.

Also he often caught her trying to write his name on the fly-leaves of the Bible Stringy had given her. All of which amused Sandy. She was such a little thing, such a dirty-faced little thing, he likened her to a puppy that rubs up against the leg of the one that feeds it. But he took no pains to disillusion her; he even allowed her to carry his rifle when he went out hunting. Stringy's eyes narrowed to slits at that.

"We'll pack up now," he told the other four, "and just as soon as that river begins to look like a river again we'll get away. We don't want to have to tote a squaw back to Nome, and we don't want to leave any grass widows behind."

Sandy overheard. He had come back for his pipe.

"Say!" he roared. "Do you think I'm fool enough to marry one of those mongrels? Do you think— Bah! When I double up I'll marry a woman that's human!"

Stringy straightened up from his packing and laid his hand fatherly-like on his shoulder.

"Stick to that, lad," he said.

When Stringy Yolles slid the canoes into the water a fortnight later, Noatuk stood on the bank and waved her hand to Sandy; she had gained a knowledge of the white man's language and religion. Sandy lifted out a paddle and waved it; he had gained nothing, and he promptly forgot that. And up on the side of the hill behind the shack a gray-fox pup stood and watched them.

The next morning Noatuk came and sat on the river-bank to watch the swift current swirl down toward her. The next morning she came again, and the next.

Every day for three weeks following the going of Sandy, she sat in the sand with Stringy's Bible in her lap and watched the broken branches, and the bits of bark, and the dead leaves of the season that was gone, hurry by on the current; but Sandy did not come back.

The tribe moved west; Noatuk was missing the morning they struck camp. And up on the side of the hill the gray-fox pup peered through the bushes and watched them go.

THE second time Sandy Dewar paddled up the Porcupine he was working for himself; that was in 1914, and Sandy was forty years an old man, full of bad whisky, and shiny-pated.

There were two other men in the prospecting party, both with a greater respect for cold water, Providence, and gray-haired council showing in their bronzed faces, eager eyes, and silent attentive attention. So when Stringy Yolles heard that they were planning to start out so late in the season, and feeling that his age and experience called on him to try and dissuade them from such a foolhardy undertaking, he went to see them and advised them to wait till Spring.

Sandy was drunk, ugly tempered, antagonistic. Sandy had wallowed through his second score of years in Chicago. He protested emphatically.

"Stay here?" he sneered savagely. "Hang around this little strip of the woods like a whipped cur, without enough of the needful to buy a jerk of gin? Huh! Not any, Whiskers. I'm going to get right out and keep on digging as long as I can find the ground."

Stringy Yolles frowned; back in his memory those puffed eyes, crooked features, and peculiar harsh voice were trying to associate with some section of his past, but Stringy's hair was white, and only very important events bridged that twenty-year gap. Then, too, those twenty years had made another face for Sandy. Stringy gave it up.

"You'd sooner take a chance on cheating the frost than on the charity of your fellow men?" he asked. "You'd sooner be found blue-white and brittle in the snow than thank your natural brothers for your daily bread? For why?"

"For why?" Sandy sat up and leered viciously at Stringy. "For why?" he repeated. "Do you think I want to stay here till I croak in this devil's dump? What in blazes do you think I am? For why——"

He drained the flask he had been waving in his hand and pitched it out the door.

"What's out there?" he snarled. "Swedes and Poles and Hunkys and Finns, Chinks and Niggers and Indians and dogs, night that's half day, and fifteen dollars a quart for whisky. Whisky? Cold coffee, bed-bug poison, slimy, soak - your - feet - in - it, wash-on-Monday slop, without one punch in a whole —— demijohn! For why!"

He sneered with a yawn of intoxicated exasperation, then stretched out on his back again and closed his eyes.

"I'm not going to stay here like a cripple all Winter and beg my grub. That's for why! You two can stay if you like, but I'm going out in the morning."

Stringy Yolles lit his pipe. The other two men sat down and looked at Stringy, but Stringy had finished. Stringy's popularity at the Fort was due to his knowledge of men and occasions; he knew when it was time to quit talking. He had offered the advice of a life's experience; if Sandy wouldn't take it, it was no business of his if Sandy never came back.

Somehow, as he left the three in the tent, Stringy wished Sandy had been sober, sober enough to answer a few questions about his past. Sandy's peculiar harsh voice was still ringing in his ears, but he couldn't remember.

Sandy made but twenty-five miles in the next three days. His whisky-soaked system protested against the long, continuous pull up-stream, so he drifted into the bank, and tying to a bush, stretched out for a sleep.

When he awoke it was dark. Refreshed, and more nearly sober than he had been for weeks, he decided to paddle all night. There had been a couple of good strikes made in the Old Crow section; he'd go up there.

When he reached the Big Black it was so dark he could hardly see it. Sum Crab's shack was in the shadow of the hill behind it; he didn't see that at all.

Swinging to the left he paddled over to the quiet water along the shore and kept on up the Porcupine. Sound asleep in the shack Sum Crab lay on her bunk with the box for a pillow. Up on the high bank of the Big Black a mangy gray fox lifted his head and smelled of the wind, then with his ragged tail between his legs he limped away from the water, with many backward glances toward the east and the coming of the breeze.

* * *

A MONTH later, sober, disgusted, discouraged, Sandy came back. Day after day and far into the night he paddled with the current. Every morning he tested the shell-ice on the quiet pools and noted with renewed alarm its increasing thickness. His worn Summer clothes were all he had, and he had seen one man brought in from the long white trail. Only an Indian he had been, but he looked very human as he lay there in the snow with his staring eyes and rigid arms and legs and unholy color.

That was twenty years ago, a long time in a wasted life; but Sandy had not forgotten it. Right there, too, it had been found, in that very section. Would he be found that way?

He drove his paddle into the black water and swung around a bend. He wished he had taken old Whiskers' advice and waited till Spring. He had gained nothing by going. He would have to face the old man and the other two empty-handed.

It was beginning to get dark when Sandy ran into the junction of the two rivers, and for a few minutes he could not persuade himself that that tributary was the Big Black. Then he saw the shack.

Twenty years, twenty long ill-used years lifted themselves from the river and the hills and the old log shack that he had helped, very unwillingly, to build. One swift glance of the two decades he got, then the hovering darkness dropped down and blotted out the landscape. Up on the side of the hill the weary gray fox turned a puzzled glance down to the drifting smoke from the shack chimney and tottered away. Sandy drifted down past the mouth of the Big Black and a hundred yards beyond.

"Twenty years ago," he muttered. "What have I been doing all that time?"

He pulled the canoe up on the bank and sat down on its prow.

"Twenty years of lost time!" he snarled. "Twenty years of fighting rough-necks and booze, and not a thing to show for it but a busted face, a busted pocket, and a bald head!"

He arose and walked back till he could see the smoke against the stars.

"It don't seem like twenty years since I made smoke come out of that same old chimney myself," he mused half angrily. "It don't seem all that time since I sat in there and—and tried to teach a puppy-faced squaw to be human. Bah! Indians! I wonder where the little fool is now? Toting wood and water for some lousy yellow-face and a dozen snarling puppies, I suppose; and a face on her like an Egyptian mummy. Huh!"

He turned and started back, then with an oath he stopped short and dropped to his knees behind a bush.

"A box of gold-dust that weighs two hundred!" he breathed. "And only an old squaw watching it!"

He felt for the gun in his belt. He, too, had heard Bull Morgan's story.

"Sandy," he asserted authoritatively, "you will go through Fort Yukon without stopping, and at Christmas you'll be drunker than a boiled owl in Chicago—on champagne!"

Three hours later Sandy crept around to the door of the shack and listened. Above the hill behind a single snow-flake drifted down and settled on the mangy tail of the old gray fox. Sandy smiled.

He didn't intend to kill her unless—— With his breath caught in his throat he put his shoulder against the door and pushed it steadily inward. The shack was vacant.

That room was very familiar to him. There was the stone fireplace and the old log seats and the row of bunks along the wall; there were the squaw's blankets and —there was the box.

He crossed the room in a few rapid strides and stopped. The firelight cast weird shadows in the corners and the door had swung shut. Where was the squaw? He shook his nervousness off and reached for the box. And then—then something struck him in the back.

Something hot and long bit into him between his shoulders and sent a paralyzing thrill down his spine and into his legs—

something that drove a shrieking wail up into his brain and ended in a shower of sparks before his eyes. His hand dragged to his belt.

A flash of flame lit up the inside of the shack. The old squaw's face, Sum Crab's face, leered up into his. Once more he pulled the trigger. Then the wind swirled a cloud of snow around the shack and slammed the door fast.

Up in a hole in the side of the hill behind, an old gray fox lay on his side, and his gaunt, ragged flanks showed no movement in his silent lungs.

A month later Stringy Yolles swung down the river with his sledge and stopped. Every Winter for twenty years he had stopped there on his way down, to watch for a moment the smoke curling from Sum Crab's chimney and to look back over the long, long years between. And now no smoke hung in the air; no foot-marks led from her door. Stringy climbed the bank and kicked the door in.

Sum Crab lay on the floor where Sandy's second shot had dropped her—lay on her side with a glad smile frozen on her face and her rigid arm frosted solidly into Sandy's neck. Beside them lay a revolver with two chambers empty, and a long knife darkly stained.

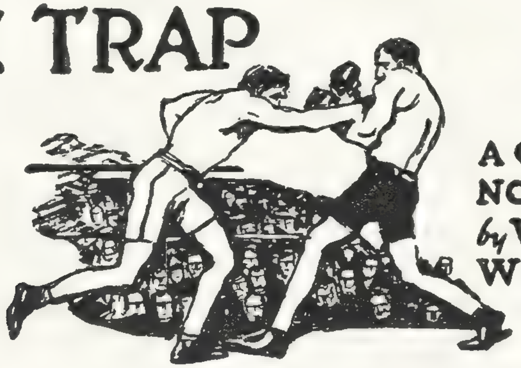
Stringy glanced at the box on the bunk, and to the dark spots in the packed earth floor and understood. He rolled back Sandy's shirt-cuff and found the tatooed cross; Sandy had come back.

Stringy walked to the door and stood looking out for a long, long while, then he came back and looked down on the box.

For twenty years Sum Crab had sat in the sand in the Summer and picked "white pepper out of black" and waited for Sandy, and now—Sandy had come back. Stringy opened the box and looked in.

He found a Bible that once had been his, a few rags of a rotten blanket, a pair of very tiny beaded moccasins, and dust—a double handful of dust, gray, damp, moldy dust, dust that he reverently buried in a grave in the floor of the shack, between Sandy Dewar and Noatuk, old Pekue Pahe's daughter.

THE TRAP



A COMPLETE NOVELETTE by WILLIAM WEST

Author of "The Boss' Daughter," "The Range Rider," etc.

THE SHOUTING and the tumult had died. The crowd—if the two hundred and odd "fistic fans" who had recently watched the program offered by the Fort Jones Athletic Association could be described by that term—had followed the example of the Captains and the Kings, and departed, leaving behind them an odor of tobacco smoke and peanuts.

In the dingy dressing-rooms of the Avenue Rink, victor and vanquished awaited the coming of the promoters with the reward of the first and the solace of the second, to wit: the guaranteed sums of money which they were respectively to receive for their exertions.

"Young Kelly," to the vital statisticians more correctly known as Abe Bernstein, self-styled welter-weight champion of the world, bore few marks of the recent combat, which he had won. There was a slight redness as to one cheek and a puffiness of lip apparent, which told that some of the blows of his opponent had gone home, but his comely features were otherwise not at all marred. His dark, clean-cut face was as attractive as ever and his curly hair framed it as jauntily as though he had not recently battled for ten rounds against a foe reputed formidable.

Now, at ease and clothed in the latest mode of the "House of Fineheimer," he lolled nonchalantly on the end of his upturned suit-case and watched the door with beady, glittering eyes that were cunningly in keeping with his shrewd type of face. There was no man of business to help him, for Kelly had no use for a manager, as more than one promoter had found to his cost. He conducted his own business affairs and, in addition, managed those of several other fighters of more or less note.

Therefore, the only other occupant of the room was a young man of Fort Jones who had enlisted with him as a second, impelled thereto by his particular sort of hero worship.

Dinky Burgess, the silent partner of the trio that made up the Fort Jones Athletic Association, and who was generally suspected of supplying the money necessary to its activities, opened the door and came into the room, disseminating an atmosphere of gloom as he carefully closed it behind him.

The cunning eyes of Young Kelly twinkled up and down over his broad back and rested for a moment on the folds of flesh, sparsely sprinkled with stubbly hair, at the back of his neck. They were much like the eyes of a weasel at that moment, but an instant later, when the promoter turned languidly, they had become as bland and guileless as such sharp and close-set orbs could be.

YOUNG KELLY smiled cherubically upon the burly promoter. His manner was that of one who trusts whole-heartedly, like a child who has never experienced deception.

"Well," he remarked cheerfully, "I'm all ready for the handout, Dinky."

Burgess mopped his shining forehead and sighed. A trace of discomfort remained about him.

"Now, honest, Abe," he complained, "this ain't no sort of hole for a square guy to get into! But you know me, Abey. When I tell you that it ain't any of my doin', so help me Mike, you're goin' to believe me—see! Ten year, off'n' on, I been followin' this game, and there ain't no such thing ever happened before, believe me. If I'd 'a' knowed them guys was that kind of sport, I wouldn't 'a' never gone near to 'em without I had my money pocket padlocked!"

Abe's face fell ingenuously.

"Aw, say now, Dinky!" he whined. "You ain't goin' to welch on the guarantee, are you?"

Mournful protest was in every note of Dinky's voice.

"Me welch on you, Abey! You know I wouldn't do that to no one. But listen now, Kid. It ain't me that is doin' this! I reckon you know that it's them fellows, Bill Jenks and Otto Switzer, runnin' out on me and leavin' me to hold the sack.

"You seen the crowd, yourself, Abey, and you know that, what with all the deadheads them fellows let in, there wasn't fifty solid iron men in the house. It appears like fights between welters don't draw no kind of crowds, nohow. If you was a lightweight or a middle, we could ha' raised a mob that would ha' let us out all right, but at a hundred and forty-five pounds you can't get no real money past the door."

"But I ain't got anything to do with that, Dinky," complained the pugilist. "I was guaranteed five hundred—win, lose or draw—with privilege of a percentage. I don't want the percentage, but where's my five centuries?"

The burly promoter, with a sigh that would have drawn sympathy from a stone, drew his wallet from his pocket and abstracted a bundle of bills from it.

"I put up all the money for this racket," he mourned, "and first and last, it's cost me quite a little something. I know you was guaranteed, Abey, but I didn't sign the contract, noways. Now, Jenks and Switzer have pulled their freight with everything in the treasury except the night's gate. They didn't wait for that when they saw the mob. They took all of mine there was left, too. I ain't really liable for this, at all, Abey, but I'm a square man and I'm going to hand you out every jitney we've taken in tonight."

He counted out fifty-two dollars in bills and dived into his trousers pocket for a handful of small change. Of this he carefully assembled two dimes, a nickel and a quarter, and, placing them on the sheaf of bills, laid the whole on the rough shelf that did duty as a dressing-table.

"And if you don't take my word for it, that there is all we took in," he said, "you can go and ask the man on the gate."

The pugilist, profoundly admiring the art displayed in this careful accounting, looked from the money to the promoter and back again.

"And what does that dub I just smeared get?" he asked.

Dinky Burgess smiled scornfully.

"Him?" he remarked. "He didn't have no guarantee nor nothing. I reckon he'll have to pan-handle it home."

Abraham Bernstein, otherwise known to fame as "Young Kelly, Welter-weight Champion of the World" let his gaze rest on the dusty rafters and whistled softly. But Dinky Burgess was, in spite of his superior size and bulk, relieved to see that there was no sign of anger or indication of revengeful intent in his attitude or manner. He mused over some thought for a few minutes before he spoke, and the promoter meanwhile cleared his throat and mopped his head, uncomfortable and at a disadvantage.

"It's sure a fact that there don't seem to be much interest in boxing down this way," said Abe, at last.

His voice indicated the regret that he felt at the fact and the resignation with which he accepted it. Burgess, his confidence restored as soon as the prizefighter had spoken the soft answer, broke out into eager disclaimer.

"It ain't so, Abey," he rejoined. "If I could put on the right kind of a bout, there's ten thousand in Fort Jones and round about that'd pay from one to five for seats. But you know yourself, because you wouldn't be fightin' for no five hundred guarantee if you didn't, that there ain't no interest in the welters. If you was a light-weight or a middle, as I says before, you could draw the crowds—but the welters don't get the publicity.

"When I sat there tonight and heard you, just before the bell rang, get off that hot air about bein' willing to fight anybody in the world that was anywheres near your size, I couldn't help wishin' you could make one thirty-eight or less and sign up to meet Marty McGuire himself. You see how it goes, don't you? Here's McGuire—light-weight by name, though they say he couldn't make one thirty-three and be strong enough to break an egg, yet he figures as "Murderin' Marty" and names his own price. While you, as much a champion as him, can't draw a bigger crowd in a sportin' community than we had here tonight. It's just because you're a welter and nothin' else."

Young Kelly pondered this proposition extensively.

"It looks like there's something in what you say, Dinky," he admitted. "Maybe, though, it's just because there ain't any real class to the welters. I got to fight seeds like this Kid Walcott because, since Benny O'Keefe went up to the middles and Marty McGuire still poses as a light-weight, there ain't any other kind in the class."

"And," remarked Burgess with a laugh intended to take the sting out of the words, "if there was, it's some likely you wouldn't be claimin' to be champion of the world. Hey!"

But Abe frowned at this levity, his small eyes growing hard and menacing.

"If you think," he said unpleasantly, his jaw moving outward a trifle, "that I'm nothin' but a cheese champ, I'll take you on at catch-weights, no rules at all, and tear the block offa you in quicker time than it took to put it on. Just say the word, sport—say the word!"

"Nothin' personal at all, Abe!" Burgess cried. "I wasn't knockin' you one bit! I was just remarkin' on the fact that you got your title really by default, since O'Keefe went to fightin' middles before you could get a crack at him. I don't take no stock at all in what some of them says when they ask who you ever licked to get the championship. I know Marty McGuire said you wouldn't even make a fair sparrin' partner, but if he thinks you're so poor as all that, why don't he take up your challenge? It ain't the first time you've offered to take him on like you did again tonight, and it looks to me like he's afraid of you."

"There ain't any question of that," agreed Abe candidly. "I've offered to fight that guy at a hundred and thirty-six at three o'clock—and he can't make much better himself—any way he wants to split the purse. But can I get a rise outa him? I can—like a lead ball!"

Burgess shook his head mournfully.

"I don't take too much stock in these

challenges," he said. "But if I could stage a bout between headliners like McGuire and you, I could clean up a pile. There's a lot of oil millionaires 'round this country, and there wouldn't be no labor in gettin' a gate of twenty thousand."

"It ain't the challenge that counts," replied Abe, sagely. "Boxin' is a business, like everything else. If you can put up purse enough, I wouldn't wonder but what McGuire would listen to you."

"Maybe," answered Burgess. "But, you see, you couldn't make the weight."

Abe laughed tolerantly.

"I can train down as low as Marty can, at that," he grinned. "If you want to, Dinky, you can publish in the papers that there never was a time when I couldn't give that slob five pounds in the weight and knock him cold if only I could run as fast as him. You tell your friend, the sportin' editor, what I say, and remark that, if necessary, I'll pay McGuire five hundred cases to get between the ropes with me, and let him have the gate, if that's the only way to do it.

"Just say I said that the time I knocked him down in N'Orleans wasn't no fluke like he said, but that I could ha' done it again in every round—only he was cryin' on my shoulder in the clinches and beggin' me to let him stay the limit, and I didn't have the heart to hit him hard again. After that gets to Marty, and you come over with a good offer, maybe there'll be something doin' with him."

"I reckon that'd make him red-headed!" chuckled Burgess. "If he bites at that, I can promise you the split of ten thousand between you."

"Well," said Young Kelly, as he rose and picked up his suit-case, in an apparent afterthought carelessly stuffing the wad of money in his pocket, "I wouldn't say it'd actually rile him up. In this business it don't pay to be too hot-headed. But if there's a liberal purse and enough notice of the fuss in the papers, there'd ought to be something stirring. But—" he frowned upon the promoter—"this'll be a certified check deposited before the fight and nothin' like a paper guarantee."

"If you can get me a rise outa Marty McGuire," said Burgess fervently, "I'll stand ready to put up the cash in gold double eagles if you want it that way!"

"Well, I've given the challenge and you know what I think of him," said Abe indifferently. "It's up to you to lay the bait where he can smell it."

He then sauntered out of the room and made his way to the street and down it to his hotel, his hat set jauntily on one side and his features looking tolerantly and with good nature on the surroundings.

The young man of Fort Jones who had been his second followed him at a respectful distance, and wondered if he would ever achieve such distinction in the fistic field as would cause the loss of four hundred and forty-seven dollars and fifty cents to appear like a mere nothing.

II

IT TAKES the mails about twenty-four hours to carry a letter, under normal conditions, from Fort Jones to St. Louis. In a little less than three days, if the correspondent is prompt, an answer may be expected.

This fact explains why Abe Bernstein, for the ensuing week, showed no disposition to forsake the environs of Fort Jones. A correspondence of some importance was going on between himself and a party in the latter city, and, until it was completed, he had no intention of moving.

The hotel was a good one, and he commanded money enough to make his stay comfortable. His composition expended considerable energy, for he was not a ready penman, and the hour or more that he spent in the writing-room of the hotel on that first night and the periods of literary activity that followed cost him more real effort than all the exercise that he took in Riley's gymnasium, where he kept up a pretense of training. The result was the following production.

This was a letter addressed to John Simpson in St. Louis:

FRIEND HOLY:

You heard by this time that I put away this here Kid Walcott in the seventh, which same wouldn't be no news to you because he's a cheese and a rank one at that. But I reckon you wouldn't know that Dinky Burgess put it over me on the guarantee, because you wouldn't think I could ever be that easy as to go on without seeing the cash in my fist first.

But then you never been in this burg and you ain't seen the way they bulge around the hip pocket, and if there wasn't more than a couple hundred sports in the crowd, if you'd 'a' searched them I bet you'd got more than a bushel of gatlings out of only that many and maybe more. He had the nerve to give me fifty-two cases and four bits for my end and I went and split that with Walcott because I felt sorry for him, and then I might need him some time later and it won't hurt to find him feeling right toward us.

Well, friend Holy, this is just to say that Dinky Burgess nor no one else can get away with that kind of stuff while I got my health, and so I want you to help at that end with a little hot stuff and kid these rubes down here along until they are ready to fall. There's a mess of plutes in this burg and hereabouts that made it out of oil, but I guess they ain't any smarter for all that, hey? You get your Uncle Dudley, don't you?

Now, friend Holy, what we want is to get up a ruction that'll stir up the natives and make them think there is war on between Marty McGuire and me and that we got to have blood before we will be satisfied. We can work the old game on these pikers because they ain't on to it no more than a rabbit.

Leave it to me to fix McGuire so that there won't be no holler from him. I'll slip him a few iron men like we done before and then if we can keep it dark except for this neck of the tall grass everything will be dead easy. But you'll have to wise up Micky and get him in shape and then sneak down here after we got the papers talking about it. We'll pull off a little rough stuff in the hotel here and then spread it that nothing goes but a finish fight, and the law is against that, so they will have to take it to the woods somewheres and we can make it secret enough so that all the papers won't be talking about it and some wise guy blow in with the dope that some one is running a ringer for Marty McGuire, because Marty will be somewhere else all the time.

You get me, don't you? You better get some cards and letter-heads printed for A. B. Crabbe like we done before, if you haven't none of them old ones left. Tomorrow I will send you the clippings from the paper here and what to write to them and then you better be ready to bring Micky down and pull off the rough stuff here. Thanking you as ever and so no more from

Yours truly,
Abe Bernstein.

There was a young lady clerk who dispensed cigars and papers in the hotel lobby during the day, and went home, with true Southern regard for propriety, before the night fell, a stray bellboy or porter then taking her place. Her name, as Mr. Bernstein had already discovered, was Carola Messenger, and she boasted distinguished ancestry which had been reduced by the issue of the Lost Cause.

She also possessed an attraction which appealed to plebeian and aristocrat alike and ensured her counter being a popular corner of the lobby. In spite of her vocation she was so obviously a gentlewoman that even the most dense traveling salesman refrained from becoming unduly familiar with her, though she was affable and agreeable with all of them.

Abraham Bernstein knew well, from having kept his eyes open, that Dinky Burgess, in spite of his antecedents and character, regarded Miss Carola with affectionate hope and determination. Being exceptionally shrewd, he realized from the first that the girl was not likely to fall a victim to the vulgar wiles of a professional pugilist, and as her beauty won his admiration, the welter-weight, spurred also by his feud with Burgess, set his wits to work in her direction also.

Since yesterday his half artistic, half sentimental regard for her had been fanned by his resentment into quite a different feeling in which she entered as a personality hardly at all. She became merely another cog in his schemes to pay off the debt he owed to the man who had cheated him out of his earnings. He was vindictive enough to have married the girl if he had been able just to foil Burgess's evident desire for her.

His letter had been sent, and in the morning he hastened to the lobby cigar-stand to see how the other threads of his plot were stitching. Miss Carola looked up from the paper he sought and answered his elaborate and ultra respectful salute with a bright smile and a little nod of the head.

There was even more interest than usual in her regard. A famous pugilist was a rarity that excused considerable curiosity, even on the part of a lady, and the events that followed the recent combat in which he had engaged sufficed to strengthen that interest almost to absorption.

Carola had to admit that Bernstein, or Kelly, as she thought his name to be, was very far different from her imagined heroes of the prize ring. He was no brutalized thug nor anything like it. On the contrary, he had seemed to be a rather dapper, bright-faced and handsome young man of slightly under average size, with a beautiful lithe build and extremely bright eyes.

If there were crudities in his manner her own experience with the ways of the world was so limited that she could hardly detect them. He was always extremely polite and deferential to herself, and that, to a Southern girl, goes far to mark the gentleman. His physical perfection was apparent to the casual glance, and a woman is attracted to a man by bodily comeliness even as the man is to the woman. Wherefore Miss Carola was fain to entertain a secret titillation—a slight shiver of romantic exhilaration—

whenever occasion brought the distinguished Young Kelly to her counter.

"A beautiful morning, is it not?" opined Abe, in his best imitation of debonair and easy elegance, such as he had often seen displayed by dramatic scions of fashion in the theatres he had frequented.

"It sehtainly is, Mistah Kelly!" agreed Carola, with a slight blush. "Is thehe anything I can do fo' you-all, this mawning?"

"If I might trouble you for a copy of the *Telegram*," the pugilist breathed. "Thank you very much! I hope there's more news than usual in it?"

The slight touch of excitement which she had displayed while herself reading the sheet deepened as she passed it to him. She could hardly be blamed for thinking that such news as it contained would be more than interesting to him, of all people.

"Indeed thehe is!" she exclaimed. "Why, Mistah Kelly—" Abe made a scornfully deprecating gesture at the name— "thehe's a pehfectly scandalous account of youh fight in that papeh! I just know that you neveh made any such remahks as that papeh says you did!"

"There ain't no—isn't no interest in that fight," replied Abe with well-dissembled disgust. "As for the remarks—let us see what they are. It's true that I was some red-headed yesterday when Dinky Burgess repeated some things to me. Ah! here's the sporting page! Quite a headline, don't you think? 'Welter Champ hurls hot defi at Murdering Marty! Bad Blood Boiling Between Pugs!' Now really, Miss Messenger, the whole thing is rather vulgar, don't you think?"

Miss Carola shuddered.

"But you really didn't say you only want the chance to push his face in so fah that his back teeth will bend, did you, Mistah Kelly? I actually couldn't believe that of you!"

Abe laughed in an annoyed manner, folding up the paper and slapping his thigh with it.

"I wish you wouldn't call me 'Mister Kelly' Miss Messenger," he remonstrated. "In such a profession as this, any gentleman has to cop a monick—I mean that one has to sport a—a false name, you know."

"Oh!" said Miss Carola, interested. "But I don't know youh real name!"

Abe was deeply chagrined.

"And I'm afraid I can't tell you what it is," he mourned, his shame obvious. "It wouldn't be right for me to do it. Well, let it go! Coming back to this thing, I guess I'll have to admit that I said something like that. This fellow, McGuire, is a rotten sport—no class at all, you understand—and he's shot off his mouth about me more than I can stand.

"I put him down for the count last year in New Orleans, and after that the referee had the crust to give him the decision on points; and ever since then I've tried to get him where I could get another good crack at him, but the big stiff won't come across. Beastly cad, he is! Regular rough-neck! Never had no education!"

There was a broad intimation in his manner of saying this that left Carola no choice but to conclude the mysterious Mr. Kelly's education had been utterly complete and had taken him through the portals of the most exclusive institutions of learning the land could boast of. Her ready imagination, even as he had hoped it would, seized upon his hints and began to construct a romance in which he figured as the impoverished son of some distinguished family, driven by circumstances into the low calling he followed, while despising it in his heart.

A slightly melancholy look that he affected while near her lent extreme probability to this theory. Her lips parted slightly as she made her deductions, her eyes seeking his dark and now melting orbs.

"I could wish," he added with a sigh, "that this—if I can drive the guy into the ring—should be my last fight. It is a degrading profession, at best, no matter how one tries to keep high-toned in it."

"I cehtainly think you ahe too good foh it," agreed Carola sympathetically.

Young Kelly sighed and rolled his eyes upward, only to let them fall dejectedly again. Then he turned from the counter and retired to the writing-room. He might have been heard to mutter under his breath as he sat down and cast a sidelong glance toward the cigar-stand:

"Say, she'd fall for any bunk I'd want to throw! I reckon that'll salt Mr. Burgess's tail for a while."

III

ABE settled down to read the account of his late unpleasantness and the succeeding matter in which his threats against the light-weight champion were luridly set out. Evidently Burgess had taken full advantage of the hint that had been given him and had seen to it that no insult his imagination could manufacture should escape publicity. Abe, reading the delicate morsel, grinned with appreciation of Dinky's efforts coupled with those of the sporting writer of the paper. Then he set to work once more at his composition, which was again addressed to the same party.

Friend Holy:

Well, old man, here is the dope that I have going down here in this burg and you can see for yourself it is pretty hot stuff. Burgess has went and fell for the game just as I thought he would, and it's up to you and Micky to do the rest. Just you have the stuff I am sending you copied and send it down to this here sporting ed. and I will do the rest.

Micky and you will have to drift down here in a few days and by that time I will have it all set for the big killing. Just to wise you up I will say that Micky wants to be even more red-headed than me and he has got to stage a phony rough-house with me down here at the hotel or somewheres where everybody will hear about it. We will make it look like this thing is for blood and that they will have to pull it off in the tall grass and make it a finish fight.

Then when every one has their money down I guess it won't be so hard to put over the double cross on these Johnny Wiseheimers, hey? Maybe this Burgess guy won't be so ready to bilk the next pug he runs across, I guess.

Ain't that the truth, now? Well, so long until pretty soon.

As ever, your friend,
A. Bernstein.

When this was completed he set to work on another document, which, when finished, he tucked, together with the clipping from the paper, into the envelope in which the letter was mailed. Then, with the consciousness of good work well done, he strolled out into the streets to look about him.

In due time a letter was handed to him from the clerk's counter. It was from his friend, John, or "Holy" Simpson.

Friend Abey:

I seen in the paper that you put Walcott away the other day. Also contents of letter noted and much regret that Micky ain't in shape to help put it over on that stiff, Burgess. You see he gets an offer from the movies to stage McGuire's fight with Caton in each state and there's a pot of dough in it for us.

You know they can't ship the films nowhere no more and so they gets Micky to do McGuire in all the states so they can put the films out in each one of them. It'll mean something like seventy-five and expenses for each film, and there'll be forty-five of them. So you see where he gets off on that.

Can't you hold up this graft until we can get back? You see how we're fixed, Abe, don't you?

Yours,
J. Simpson.

Abe, when he had digested this, uttered something like an oath and jumped to the telegraph-desk. He scratched off a hasty message and told the operator to rush it. In the course of events it reached Mr. Simpson, in the following form:

Drop movie stuff. It will wait. This game means big money.

As Mr. Simpson owed all his well-being to Abe, who could put an end to it whenever he chose to withdraw his patronage, he heeded this message and gave up the plans he had made. As a result there appeared, a day or two later, a letter in the office of the *Telegram* upon which the sporting-editor seized with avidity. The next edition of the paper fairly screamed with the headlines:

"Kelly's Defi Gets Marty's Goat!"

Whoever was responsible for the matter that followed must be handed the palm for forceful invective and cutting insult. The editor published, expurgating only the unprintable, a letter purporting to come from no other than the great Marty McGuire himself, enclosed in a more formal one from A. B. Crabbe which, every sporting man knew, was the name of the famous pugilist's manager.

McGuire's epistle was a seething diatribe in which Young Kelly was described more forcefully than politely in terms so uncomplimentary as were calculated to take the curl out of his hair. It was more than hinted that Kelly's claim to be welter-weight champion was based on nothing more substantial than his innate cowardice; that McGuire well knew that said Kelly could easily make the light-weight limit, but that he had deserted that class for the higher one because he would be safer in the latter, as it contained only second-rate pugilists; that, even so, there were plenty of welters who could make him jump out of any ring if they could only first coax him into it, but that none of these had yet succeeded in doing so, the Hebrew being too wary; that he never had whipped any one that any one else had ever heard of, and that he never would unless he caught some cripple unawares; that Kelly was a thief, besides being a coward; that he never had knocked McGuire down, but that McGuire had skipped and had afterward run himself nearly to death trying to catch Kelly during the following fifteen rounds; that he didn't believe Kelly could ever be dragged within reach of himself again, or he would immediately accept his challenge. McGuire stated further he didn't want any the best of the purse, but would fight said Kelly at any time and any place before a reputable club, if only some binding guarantee could be given that said Kelly would be compelled to climb the ropes and stand still long enough for McGuire to get one solid blow at him. In final expression of opinion he referred to his rival as a "yellow Jew."

The letter from Crabbe was not so lurid. He simply said that, in view of the insulting remarks made by this Young Kelly his own protégé stood ready, whenever a suitable purse should be guaranteed by the Fort Jones Athletic Association, or any other responsible body of sporting men, to meet the said Young Kelly at any distance the law allowed, the purse to be divided sixty per cent. to the winner and forty to the loser, the winner to get half of the moving-picture receipts. Fighters to have the privilege of a percentage of the gate instead of the guarantee if they so elected. Weight to be one hundred and thirty-eight pounds ringside.

IT MAY well be imagined that, in a town like Fort Jones where the streets were full of men who had made fortunes almost overnight in the oil-fields, and who were of the extreme sporting type, almost to a man, this presage of excitement created a great deal of talk. Knots of citizens of this and surrounding counties gathered on the corners and asked each other what they knew about that!

Many a man buttonholed Dinky Burgess and offered to loosen the band around his wallet and contribute a portion of any guarantee required. Others begged him to list them for a certain number of choice ringside seats and waived the question of price altogether.

But there were many who were skeptical. The recent bouts had been of so mediocre description that they believed the whole thing to be nothing but a fake. There were those who had heard of or seen Young Kelly's performance against Walcott, an admitted third-rater, and who generally regarded the alleged welter-weight champion as a bare second-rater himself, and one whom Marty McGuire, the famous "Murdering Marty," would dispose of without any trouble whatever. Yet even these had to admit that, in the fight at New Orleans, pulled off over a year ago, this same Young Kelly had actually knocked the famous McGuire to the floor and only the bell had saved him from a knock-out.

Whatever might be the explanations or excuses offered for this event, the fact remained unchallenged, and so Kelly's chances were thought by many to be more than good. The state law, however, restricted all boxing exhibitions to a duration of ten rounds, and this was the cause of much regret. The populace of Fort Jones was desirous of getting a settlement of the mooted question of superiority that would satisfy for all time, and nothing but a finish fight offered that certainty.

Around the hotel, especially, there was much talk and discussion of the approaching event, and Kelly's comings and goings were watched with extreme interest. There were those who noted that his expression had become morose and belligerent, and it was common knowledge that he had expressed himself in terms that left no doubt of his bitterness toward his rival.

Even Miss Carola knew this to be a fact. For had not Kelly, on the morning following the publication of that insolent letter, stopped at her counter for a package of chewing-gum, and had he not, on that occasion, been hard put to it to conceal his grief and rage? So obviously had this been so that she had called attention to it and even tried to cheer him up.

"Why, Mistah Kelly!" she had breathed sympathetically. "Yuh look all to'e up oveh something! Sholy now, you ahen't taking that disgusting story in the papeh sehiously, ahe you?"

Kelly had gritted his white teeth audibly.

"No!" he had choked. "I'm not paying any attention to that hog-wash, Miss Carola! But what I been telling you is proved by this guy, ain't it? I want to ask you how a gentleman could stay in such a low game as this when that's the kind of stuff he has to run up against?

"I ain't caring, myself, what this here low-brow, McGuire, calls me! I fixed *him* once before—and I can do it again. But think what it means to a man like me, a fellow what has the class I got, to have to read myself called names like that! 'Yellow Jew!' Me a Jew! And it's a fact I'm telling it to you, Miss Carola, so help me, that my great-grandfather is a Egyptian Prince, and nothing less! What am I saying? I didn't mean to let that out, I assure you."

Miss Carola opened her eyes in proper awe.

"What!" she ejaculated. "An Egyptian Prince! Why, Mistah Kelly, yuh astonish me."

"Oh, not me!" he deprecated instantly. "I'm a plain Amurican meself. *He* was run outa Egypt long ago and lost all the jew'ls and things he had over there. My family didn't have more'n enough to send me through them colleges. I had to go to work like common folks, and some day I'd like to tell you how I come to take up the fightin' game. But you don't blame me for gettin' sore over havin' to associate with roughnecks like this here McGuire, do you, and bein' called names like them?"

"Why, no indeed!" exclaimed Carola. "I should think the grandson of a Prince would simply have a fit if he was called anything like that! I hope you whip that man, Mistah Kelly—I do so!"

This outspoken favoritism encouraged Abe. He leaned over the cigar-case and fixed his ardent eyes upon her face, which she was constrained to draw back a little.

"Miss Carola," he murmured through set teeth, "if you give me the office, I'll only hit that guy once, and then, if he's still standin' up, I'll go around behind him and see what is propping him! If *you* encourage me, Miss Carola, I aim to make him so hard to catch that every one will think he's a rabbit."

Even Carola, unsophisticated as she was, began to have a vague suspicion that Abe's diction and methods of expressing himself were losing their elegance in the stress of excitement. But perhaps she thought that he had merely been forced to associate with rough characters for so long that he had picked up habits of speech rather incompatible with the education he boasted. However, he embarrassed her with his intent regard, and she was compelled to lower her gaze before his, while something like a flush crept over her cheek.

"I really hope you punish him," she said vaguely, but he read in this very uncertainty of expression a confession of the interest he had excited in her.

"Oh, don't you worry!" he said portentously, and with a considerable access of familiarity toward her. "I'll make that guy wish he was a Quaker before I'm through with him."

Then he departed, walking with a pronounced strut, his hat tilted to a jauntily belligerent angle.

Later Dinky Burgess stopped before the stand and confided in Carola, who was habitual recipient of more secrets than she could remember.

"Say, Miss Carola," he told her excitedly, "this is the biggest thing I ever put across and I'm going to make a big winning with it. Then it's me that's through with the sporting game and the rough-necks for good. There ain't no class in promoting—but, believe me, when I've put this across I'll be able to put on dog with the best of them. It's the last time, Miss Carola, I give you my word, and after this fight I'm going to settle down and be a gentleman."

Miss Carola smiled encouragingly and gladly. She really felt pleased.

"I'm *so* glad, Mistah Burgess," she murmured. "Of cou'se I know that all these prize fightehs ahe not ruffians, foh this Mistah Kelly is a very nice young man. But I'm suah that you will be mo'e respected if you take up some otheh line. I'd cehtainly be happy to know that you had given this up."

There was enough of feeling in her voice to give Burgess more encouragement than he had had for a long time. He was impelled to lean toward her, even as Kelly had done.

"Well, it'll be your doing," he asserted earnestly. "If it wasn't for you, Miss Carola, I wouldn't ever have thought there was anything low in it. I'd ha' kept right on and been satisfied. But a girl like you can do anything with a man."

"Oh, suahly not!" deprecated Carola. "It's only that you can see yuahself that it isn't quite genteel when yuah attention is called to it. Even Mistah Kelly sees it."

A cloud settled on Burgess's florid countenance.

"Say, Miss Carola," he complained, "I ain't sayin' a word against the Jew, remember, but just the same it ain't right that you should get thick with him. I'm nothin' but a fight promoter and haven't no call, maybe, to get pious, but I can't help thinkin' that I'm a shade above a pug. It kind of lowers you to be herding with that Bernstein."

"With who?" asked the puzzled Carola.

"With this here Young Kelly, or Bernstein, which is his real monicker. Maybe he's a cut above the average battler, but take it from me that the best of them is none too good. I should know, I reckon."

"Why!" exclaimed Carola wonderingly, "I reahlly had no idea that he was a Jewish gentleman. But that is nothing against him afteh all, Misteh Burgess."

"Well, maybe not," admitted Burgess reluctantly. "Anyway, it ain't that he is a Jew, but that he's a bruiser! And," he added as if conscious of his own rectitude, "there ain't none of these pugs that ain't so crooked as they could sleep on a corkscrew. Jew—Mick—nigger—they are all alike! A bad lot, I'm tellin' you, Miss Carola!"

Carola accepted this opinion with becoming seriousness.

"I expect you know, Misteh Burgess," she said. "And I thank you foh telling me. But I can't discriminate between customehs very shahply, you know. I have to be agreeable to every one."

"I reckon that is so," said Burgess, mollified by her readiness to accept his advice. "Anyway, after we pull this fight off there won't be no Abe Bernstein hanging 'round you. Marty McGuire will mash him up so bad that you wouldn't know what race he belonged to."

"Oh, I hope he won't huht him badly!" murmured the tender-hearted Miss Carola.

IV

THERE is, at Fort Jones, a rather peculiar situation in respect to geographical and political divisions. The Black River, a large and sluggish stream, divides two states at that point. The original boundary was marked by the river-bed; but the stream, in the course of years, finding another channel more congenial to it, wandered over into the adjoining state and left a portion of what had once been foreign soil behind it.

This strip, just outside of the town, had been no man's land for some years. There had been disputes as to its allegiance which had never been settled.

The ground was not valuable, and the authorities of the one state as those of the other, considered that they had all on their hands that they could well attend to. On one side of the river they claimed that, originally, there had been no doubt that the strip belonged to the other side and that the mere fact of the river deciding to change its bed could not destroy that side's liability for its administration. On the other hand, those transriparian citizens maintained that the the river-bed was the boundary, and, when the bed changed, the boundary changed with it.

Whichever side was right, the dispute was never settled and as a consequence no administration of the strip was ever undertaken. It remained an outlaw territory, orphaned and despised, a refuge for bootleggers, resorts, gamblers and dives. The laws of both states were violated there with impunity, and the worthless strip acquired a value to certain interests that was excessive and unique. A great race track had been erected and many a rich stake was raced for on the anomalous territory.

Yet it was tacitly understood that, outside of the immediate neighborhood, the activities incident to this state of affairs should be seldom spoken of and then only vaguely. For the arm of the Federal Government, which would not hesitate to assume responsibility if conditions were called to its attention, was long, and its grip strong.

Therefore the citizens of Fort Jones, as well as those across the river, maintained a silent agreement, which extended even to the papers, that any mention of these activities should be veiled and belittling. These tactics had so far succeeded, up to date, that no busy representative of the Government had yet inquired into the jurisdictional matters involved in these violations of the statutes. Obviously, it was in this "Brimstone Bend" that Burgess and his associates had set the stage for their enterprise.

And that enterprise ran swiftly to its climax while Carola smiled demurely and impartially over her counter at her customers and fanned, unconsciously, the flames of hate, malice and jealousy that some of them concealed within them. Mr. Burgess dropped in regularly to tell the result of his negotiations with Mr. Crabbe, while Mr. Kelly stopped regularly for his chewing-gum or paper, and hinted more than once that on the outcome of this last battle depended a declaration of more than passing interest to the girl.

While the pages of the *Telegram* ceased to dwell largely on the details of the combat and became suddenly colorless and uninteresting, on the street it was well understood that this was because, seeing the bitterness that the principals had displayed, the promoters had planned to pull off a contest of more than the legal length and interest, and that it was therefore wise that officialdom should not have its attention attracted unduly to what was to occur in Brimstone Bend.

The advertising feature was by no means neglected, however. From end to end of two states the word was adroitly passed to all who might be interested that there was to be something big put across in the strip of no man's land at a near date.

Everybody knew that a purse of ten thousand dollars had been raised and that the race track had been engaged for the event. The stands already there would seat, within good view of the ring, a thousand or more, and carpenters were at work erecting temporary stands to accommodate over five times that number. A brisk demand for these seats at prices ranging from two to twenty-five dollars had developed, and there was no room for doubt that, if the affair was permitted to go ahead without interference, it would be, at least, a financial success for the promoters.

The negotiations with Crabbe had long ago been closed successfully, and it was understood that McGuire was faithfully training in St. Louis, while every one knew Young Kelly was putting in much hard work at Riley's, and was already in the pink of form, daily beating up his sparring partners, of whom his one-time antagonist, Kid Walcott, was one of the most devoted.

But the climax of public interest was yet to come. It had been announced that, at least a week before the great date, Marty McGuire would appear at Fort Jones and proceed to finish his training there and get used to the climate. Every one was naturally anxious to see the great fighter in action, and get a basis of comparison between the two men.

As yet there had been little betting, for most people took it for granted that Kelly had very little chance against his terrible antagonist, and the odds were therefore so prohibitive that few cared to take the short end of any bets. Now, betting odds frequently give a line on public opinion in other ways, and there was therefore some danger that the idea of Kelly's easy defeat would become so widely diffused as to kill a great deal of the desire to see the fight. The welter-weight's confidence in himself caused the promoters to welcome the coming of McGuire, for they reasoned that no comparison could be so unfavorable to Abe as the popular mind would, of itself, assume.

ONE day, sure enough, there was a flutter at the doors of the hotel, and several negro bell-boys had a battle royal in their frenzied efforts to get to the curb and assist the occupants of a motor-car into the lobby. Surrounded by the dusky brigade, a large and prosperous gentleman who smoked a black cigar and fairly scintillated with jewels stalked into the hotel. Behind him, eying the gaping crowd superciliously, strolled the hero himself.

There was no doubt that it was McGuire in person, with his manager, for the pages of the *Police Gazette*, much in evidence among the enthusiasts, contained his pictures in various poses. And it was strikingly easy to recognize the flesh itself, in the light of the pictorial counterfeits.

Yet, so unreasoning is the crowd mind, there was hardly one in the fast-gathering mob of spectators who was not disappointed. Not one of them but knew that the man was a light-weight and must, therefore, be small, but nearly every one had reasoned rather from his reputation than from obvious facts, and so all expected to see something very imposing.

If McGuire had lived up to expectations he would have had to fight as a heavy-weight. As it was, he produced a shock in his admirers.

He was barely five feet and a half tall and built slenderly. The effect of his pygmy proportions was enhanced by the coat he wore. It was of a style so late that fashion had not yet caught up with it. It started at his neck and continued to his knees without a waver in the exact shape of a funnel. It was about fourteen inches in circumference at the collar and as many feet at the bottom. The arms of it sloped from the shoulder-line along the flare, and in order to preserve its proper aspect, it was necessary for its wearer to acquire the habit of holding his limbs out from his sides.

Those limbs terminated in stubby hands, hidden under bright yellow gloves, with obtrusive black stitching on their backs. Under the hoop-skirt coat projected tightly creased and narrow trousers-legs, which ended some eight inches above the ground and an inch above the tops of two very bright tan shoes, with extra sharp toes and red laces. And this resplendent planet carried a Malacca cane to complete his embellishment.

When Carola Messenger perceived him she was overcome. It was impossible for her to take her eyes off him, and, in passing before her counter, this gaze reached his consciousness. The great Marty McGuire, Murdering Marty, fiercest of the long line of light-weight champions, was compelled to turn and note her presence.

His face swung about and he favored her with a stare which started to be impudent and killing, and rapidly passed through various expressions, to astonishment, uncertainty, admiration and contrition. To Carola's huge surprise his tough little features became frankly shy and abashed, and it was he, rather than herself, who blushed at the exchange.

"Why," the astounding conclusion took form in her mind, "he's nothing but a vulgah little boy!"

Vulgar he was, and his looks justified the conclusion as to his youth. And, in addition, he was not at all handsome. Not of the skilful type of boxer, McGuire had failed to preserve his original lineaments intact as had Young Kelly. He was known as a mauler, and the proof that in his time he had taken as well as given sturdy blows, was written indelibly on two puffy ears and an eyebrow knocked askew. But, though he had the "fighting face," it seemed to Carola that Young Kelly was a much more imposing creature, and she was struck with the conviction that it was a shame to let this little boy fight one so much older and bigger.

Therefore, she inclined to forget the vitriolic terms of Marty's letter to the paper, and to shift her sympathies to him. Ring records and comparative performances meant nothing to her. She pitied and therefore favored the little fellow.

However, Marty McGuire, knowing nothing of this, went his way in the wake of his important manager and disappeared into the elevator, followed by a retinue of bellboys.

Nothing further transpired until evening, at least within the notice of the people who hung about the lobby. At seven, the champion came down and ate his dinner in the café. He spent some time strolling about the place and giving his admirers a view of him until bedtime and then retired. Carola had gone home before he came down, however.

SHE resumed her duties in the morning and was busy waiting on her customers, when Young Kelly, who had recently left the hotel and taken up permanent quarters at his gymnasium, entered, and with a lordly air sent his card up to Mr. Crabbe. While he awaited that worthy's convenience, he put in the time at Carola's counter, leaning over it and monopolizing her attention as far as she would permit. This he accomplished by taking up as much room in front of it as he could cover, and whenever a customer asked for a cigar he would move with exaggerated reluctance, at the same time withering the intruder with a ferocious and cold-blooded stare.

This rather annoyed Carola, but she endeavored to hide the fact. She was relieved when Mr. Crabbe finally appeared, and Kelly, with a very elegant bow, moved away to join him.

The two went up to the balcony, which overhung the lobby, and engaged in a conversation. The whisper quickly ran around the place that Kelly, his own manager, had met Crabbe for the purpose of discussing the final details of the contract to be signed between them.

At about this time Marty McGuire, fresh and smiling, and dressed even more startlingly than he had been before, entered the lobby and surveyed it. His eye was attracted to the cigar counter and he strolled over that way.

He did not smoke, and he looked as if he might find difficulty in reading anything but large and plain print, but he showed no hesitation in approaching Carola. His smile was even more broad and ingratiating than formerly, as he placed a negligent elbow on the glass case and shoved his hat from his bulging, knotty brow. A pair of large and aggressive gold teeth flashed an answer to her own cheerful—

"What can I do foh you, suh?"

"Not'in but a pape, m'am, not'in but a pape!" he replied with a deprecating wave of the hand.

She passed him the *Telegram*, marveling at his accent. He took it in a gnarled and twisted hand whose fingers he seemed to find difficulty in opening.

"It's a nice little burg you got here," he went on, as confident of his welcome as of his ability with his fists. "De dump ain't half bad fer dis end of de extenshun. It's a live little station with a nice crop o' sports. An' de skirts is some pickin's, if de samples I seen a'ready is average."

"I'm pleased to know you like it," murmured Carola.

She had gathered that he was paying a compliment to the town, but was so hazy as to his further meaning that she did not care to risk any further comment.

"It strikes me fine!" he acclaimed. "Dey's not'in shows a town's class like de sports and de chickens. Any tank on de railroad like dis dat kin line up a real purse fer a classy bout an' kin flash a broiler like you is good enough fer me. Dere ain't not'in to it, lady! It's de goods—dat's w'at! It's de goods!"

Carola was not equal to sustaining a conversation in this vein, and yet she could not dismiss a customer. In some distress she looked up at the balcony and perceived that Young Kelly was glowering down at her, or at his rival of the ring.

The garrulous Marty followed her glance and saw his enemy. A fine contempt struggled for expression in him.

"Dey ain't but one t'ing I got ag'inst de place," he continued. "W'y, when dey was stagin' de real t'ing, didn't dey git me a match wid somethin' that kin fight? It's easy money fer me, and maybe I oughtn't to kick, but dere ain't no int'rest in lickin' a poor nut like dat Jew. If he wasn't always shootin' off about dat time he slipped one over on me down to N'Orleens, I wouldn't never heard him shoutin'."

"Why," said Carola, feeling that she must be loyal to an older friend, "Misteh Kelly is a very nice young man, and I'm suah he is quite fohmidable."

Marty snorted in disgust.

"Say, lady!" he ejaculated. "If youse are lookin' fer real class don't waste no time on that fellow. He ain't there with it—see! Take me tip, lady, and don't listen to none of his stuff. If youse are lookin' fer comp'ny, let little Marty hang around and buy you candy. Say de woid, lady, and I'll bring me trunk around."

"Isn't youh trunk hehe?" asked Carola innocently.

"Naw! W'at you givin' me?" said Marty with a good-natured laugh. "Say, you ought to get wise to class when you lamp it, lady. Dis guy ain't dere, I'm tellin' you. He's livin' on a rep he got by a fluke, and dat's de straight goods. See, it was dis way.

"Dis guy and me was matched down dere last year, and dere was not'in to it. I sized him right before de fight had gone de first round, and I knew it was easy. I was goin' along under wraps, to give de crowd a run fer its money, and I gets careless, see! In de fourt' round I feints him wid me left—like dis, see! Den I breaks ground on him, dis way, and aims to draw him across w'ere I'd git me right into his mark.

"But just den I looks around to s'lute a friend in de ring-side seats, and dis fellow, who's already half blind, swings a wild haymaker dat I don't see. Honest, lady, I was showin' him clear up before he put dat one across. He just lams away widout lookin', like dis, and I gits in de way of it. It comes—bam! Right on de point o' de jaw, and——"

"And you ain't never got over the scare it gave you since that time!" a voice of suppressed rage finished for him.

Carola started and nearly screamed.

Marty McGuire had been so interested in belittling Abe that he had forgotten the proximity of that young man. He had been performing, for the benefit of the amazed Carola, a realistic and accurate imitation of the bout at New Orleans, and had illustrated the crucial moves and blows by crouches, side-steps and swings. She had shrunk back of her case and was looking uneasily on this performance when the voice of Young Kelly interrupted.

Marty McGuire whirled about. The spectators surged forward. In the twinkling of an eye the lobby of the hotel was swarming with people who had wind of the coming fracas.

A swirling circle of pushing and crowding spectators formed around the two men. In the rear of this the burly form of A. B. Crabbe vainly tried to force a passage.

Marty shoved a pugnacious jaw forward and hunched belligerent shoulders. But Young Kelly, very much the gentleman, first turned to Carola.

"Was this guy annoying you, Miss Messenger?" he said.

"Oh, no indeed, he wasn't!" protested Carola, anxious above all things to escape a brawl at her counter. "He was enti'ely respectful, Misteh Kelly!"

"Ah, g'wan!" snarled Marty. "W'at you givin' us? D'you t'ink you're de only guy dat knows how to treat a lady? G'wan away from here if you don't want your face bent!"

His knotty hands were working and he appeared to be overcome with rage. And Kelly's darkly flushed face and set mouth bespoke a mental disturbance also. But he, unlike Marty, preserved his poise. In fact, he preserved it too elaborately. With a gesture of supreme contempt, he turned half away, so that the spectators should lose nothing of what was to transpire for want of a full view, and, bending his head as he pulled the lapel of his coat out with his left hand, flicked with the finger of his right at some dust that had gathered on it, aiming it ostentatiously at Marty. Having done this, he delicately shoved the cuffs of his shirt away from his wrists and shook his shoulders, every one understanding perfectly that all this was preparatory to demolishing the enemy.

It was very effective and gave the impression that he was making leisurely preparation to crush a worm. But the worm was early enough to turn before he was ready.

There was a wicked twinkle in Marty's eyes and he licked his dry lips. Then, as Kelly's right hand still rested on his left wrist, McGuire's crooked knuckles described a vicious circle through the space between his own hip and Kelly's face.

It was a blow worthy of his repute, and something had to yield before it. It smacked dully against Abe's cheek, and the mooted episode at New Orleans was avenged.

Abe lurched backward, caught utterly off his balance, and, after two or three frantic and sprawling attempts to get his feet back under himself, went backward into the crowd that surrounded them, which, after the manner of crowds, hurriedly faded before his progress and allowed him to fall unimpeded.

V

MR. DARROW, the handsome day-clerk, and Mr. Crabbe arrived at the scene together. But Abe, wonder still covering his face, was on his feet again and about to launch himself at Marty.

Mr. Crabbe seized him in time, while Mr. Darrow did as much for Marty. The latter was squaring off and crouching, his fists working in the air like pistons, and his feet circling around each other in peculiar breaks and swings. He was ducking and feinting at the air, breaking ground and sidestepping and grunting a lurid challenge to Kelly to get up and get another poke in the mush!

Mr. Darrow put an end to this exhibition by locking both Marty's arms from behind and above, pinning them fast to his own sides. As for Mr. Crabbe, he had Kelly by the collar and was so large that it was obviously hopeless for the pugilist to make any further struggle against his fate. But it might have been noticed that surprise was the salient expression on Crabbe's face and also on that of Young Kelly. They seemed uncertain about their future course of action.

Carola had shrunk into a far corner and had her hands over her face. She was too frightened and outraged to do anything at all.

Mr. Dinky Burgess might be seen trying to push his way to the front, but no one paid any attention to him. He had arrived just too late to witness the most interesting of the proceedings.

Young Kelly was the first to recover his wits. He saved the day for the puzzled Mr. Crabbe by bursting into a storm of objurgations directed at Marty.

"You dirty Mick!" he shrieked. "You low-down rough-neck! I licked you once yet a year ago, and I can do it some more. Let me get you in the ring again and get a crack at you! I don't want no purse nor no fight by ten rounds, you Irish, you! Oi! Let me give you a lick just once! And let me have it a fight to a finish this time!"

Marty, strange to relate, seemed to be somewhat terrified by this tirade or by some thought of his own. His attitude was fast losing its appearance of bravado and was getting troubled. Yet he made an attempt to hurl back the defiance.

"G'wan!" he snarled, but with a slight catch in his voice. "You never scared nobody but a baby—you Sheeny! Le'me git you where you can't run out on me and I'll put you on a shutter. Make it a finish fight, you big stiff, and see what I do to you. And dey don't have to split the poice fer me, neither. Winner take all, suits me."

By this time Burgess was within hearing and almost within reach.

"Here! Here!" he shouted. "You boys come out of that and quit this scrappin'. This ain't the place to settle the quarrel. Wait till you git in the ring!"

"I only want to get him there!" yelled Kelly.

"Yah! Youse'll have to tie *him* to git him near me!" retorted Marty.

But neither of them made any further resistance to being dragged from the crowd and led away to a more private spot. The spectators followed, but a door was closed in their faces. However, wood was not calculated to insulate voices raised as high as those inside the room, and they could, therefore, hear what was going on. Generally speaking, profanity and recrimination formed the major part of the debate, but the listeners had no difficulty in gathering that both the fighters were raging like tigers and insisting that no mere fight of a limited number of rounds would satisfy them.

Young Kelly, especially, screamed that he would only be satisfied with the full privilege of beating McGuire into a shapeless pulp if it took a hundred rounds, while McGuire seemed to be less belligerent, his voice being more subdued and sullen, though he, too, insisted that nothing would suit him better than a fight which should settle beyond the chance of dispute the mooted question of superiority.

Crabbe seemed to hold out for the original articles—a fight of twenty rounds and a purse of ten thousand dollars to be divided sixty and forty per cent. But the principals paid little attention to him and he yielded gradually, though reluctantly. Then there came up the question of a stakeholder. This was introduced by Crabbe.

Burgess suggested that he would have a certified check for the winner, but this was snarled away to the four winds. Kelly denounced him viciously for a crook that had robbed him once before, and declared that he would not trust him with a plugged nickel as far as he could see him. McGuire also asked him where he kept his bank references, and intimated, truculently, that his face didn't look good to him.

Crabbe demurred, also. He said that Burgess might be responsible, but that they didn't know it. Maybe he was as honest as the day was long, but he would have to look for his reward in honesty alone. They couldn't take a chance, all the more so as the affair promised to be highly illegal, and there would therefore be little chance of enforcing their claims if Burgess should be crooked.

Here a thought occurred to Young Kelly, and he made it known. None of these bankers and such, nor any checks that took time to cash, would do. When he got through with McGuire, he felt sure there would probably be trouble with the authorities. He might even be liable to an indictment for murder. Personally, he regarded it as likely that he would have to make as quick a getaway as was possible, and he didn't want to have to stop and fool with any banks while the officers of the law might be looking for him.

Marty McGuire agreed with him, but from different premises. He thought that the coroner might be looking for him as a material witness at the inquest over Kelly, or his remains. Arguing from this, the question of how they were to get their money interested him as it did Kelly.

Burgess suggested that they have the money at the ringside and deliver it when the fight was over. But Abe had an objection to this, also.

There were bound to be a number of bad men at the fight, probably with guns. What would prevent them, if it was known that such a sum was out there, from holding up the stakeholder and getting away with it? No, they must hit on some other expedient.

At this point they came out of the room and, still disputing, but now more amicably, gathered in the lobby before the desk of the clerk. They seemed unable to come to any agreement for some time, and then it was the resourceful Abe Bernstein that solved the problem. His eye lit on the countenance of Mr. Darrow, the day-clerk, which was an exceptionally open and frank one. It seemed to please him, and he banged his hand on the desk to call attention to the fact.

"There is the very feller!" he exclaimed. "After the fight we come back here, don't we? Before we get the train, hey? That is those that *can* come, come! Well, why ain't it a plan to let this feller hold the stuff? Let him be the stakeholder and hand the bundle over to the feller that wins. Then we won't have to wait for nothin', but can stop here to get our bags and catch the train after collecting our money. Let him do it."

Marty McGuire looked Mr. Darrow over. Mr. Darrow mildly shook his head, but they paid no attention to that.

"He looks straight enough to me," said Marty. "But we don't want nothin' in the safe. Let him hold it himself if some one will say he's de goods."

"Oh, Darrow's straight as a string," said Burgess, wiping his moist brow and evidently glad to get the matter settled. "It's all right with me, folks, if it is with you."

"Might as well let it go at that, then," said Mr. Crabbe, a little dubiously. "Will you act, Mr. Darrow?"

Mr. Darrow rather timidly said that he had no real objection if every one was satisfied to have him. Every one was so satisfied that each and every one shook hands with him and "called it a bet."

Mr. Darrow blushed and smiled and was nearly overwhelmed. He seemed especially interested, however, in examining Marty McGuire's features, probably because it had been that redoubtable gladiator whom he had held helpless in his arms only a short time ago.

THE fighters, as soon as this was settled, turned to Carola's counter as though to renew their courtship. But Carola had been so overcome by the events of the day that she had gone home, and a bell-boy's wide grin was all that met their eyes when they sought her place. Further hostilities were accordingly postponed, and the party broke up.

She appeared at her old stand the next morning, however, and was ready to smile on all as before. But the belligerents had apparently come to some sort of an understanding.

From this time on, Marty McGuire always stopped for a few minutes after breakfast, before he retired to let his food digest, while Abe refrained from appearing until the afternoon, at some regular interval in his training. Thus the two never met and the hotel lobby was saved from being a battle-ground.

Excitement was well stirred throughout the neighboring country, and there was no cause to fear that the crowd would not come up to expectations. It was certain that the affair was to be for blood, and, while the betting favored Marty, there were plenty who were willing to back their opinion that the larger man was the better.

Yet the odds were all against Kelly's winning, and quotations at the bookmakers ranged about three to five and two to one, with McGuire on the short end. It was known that there had been a side-bet between the principals, and that Darrow held the stakes in this affair as in that of the purse. Abe Bernstein had more money to bet on himself, too, but McGuire seemed to be satisfied with what he already had placed.

So Abe turned to the townsfolk and naturally found many to accommodate him. But he invariably insisted that Darrow should be the stakeholder, giving much the same reasons as had governed the selection of the clerk in the first place.

On the day before the fight the money from advance sales was deposited in the bank to the account of Burgess, and all was in readiness for the final stages. The grand stands were finished at the track and enough seats had been sold to make Burgess feel completely easy in his mind. Standing-room and bleacher seats were on sale besides, and went at good prices.

Fort Jones had never yet known such a crowd as began to pour into its confines from all directions and distances. Yet, for reasons already made clear, the great bout had attracted hardly any attention from newspapers outside of this section. The *Telegram* had, for many days, barely mentioned the affair, and had not even printed the names of the principals. So far as the world at large was concerned, such an event as this coming battle was undreamed of. Yet, through mysterious channels, sports from remote regions had heard of it and were appearing on the scene.

Thus, while the hotel thronged with new arrivals, the evening preceding the date set for the fight arrived. The principals were supposed to be resting in seclusion, after finishing their arduous training, but Carola was hardly surprised, about an hour before her day was up, to perceive the welter-weight champion of the world making his way through a side entrance to her counter.

She welcomed him, as always, with a smile. It would never do to hold against him the fact that he had engaged in a brawl in her presence. Besides, as a Southern woman, combativeness should not be displeasing to her.

Young Kelly evidently took this for granted. He seemed to have an important matter on his mind and be in haste to disburden himself of it.

"Miss Carola," he began, "this ain't the place to talk with you and if you would allow me to escort you home this evening I'd be obliged to you."

Carola was embarrassed and hid the fact by a semblance of extreme regret. Her eyes flitted to the desk behind which was the day-clerk, Mr. Darrow.

"Oh, I'm really sorry, Misteh Kelly!" she exclaimed. "If you had only spoken to me befo'e I'd have been delighted to accept youh escoht. But I have already made an engagement foh this evening."

Young Kelly muttered something hasty under his breath and appeared put-out.

"Well, this's the only chance I'll have," he said, "and I'll have to talk to you here. Say, Miss Carola, you're wise to me, all right. I don't have to tell you what I've been thinking about these few days. You've made a hit with me, and you know it. Well, this fight is goin' to put me on easy street where I can quit the game for good. Now, just you say the word and it's all set. Here comes some guy that wants to butt in and there's a dozen or more wantin' to nose around and pick an acquaintance with me.

"I can't stop any longer, but just you say the word. I got to make a quick getaway after the fight tomorrow, on the 'six-fifteen', and if you're game, just say you'll have your bag down here at the hotel and be ready to beat it when I come in. What say, honey?"

Carola turned white and then red, and her eyes and mouth both opened wide. Before she could answer he went on rapidly.

"We can flag a rab—a preacher, up to Springfield, and have it all fixed. Come on, honey, and say you'll be here with the grips!"

Carola choked and hid her face a moment.

"I—I—really, Misteh Kelly! Oh, I hahdly know how to say it. But I—I'll be hehe with my things if you reahlly wish it!"

Kelly uttered a suppressed cry of joy.

"Oi, oi!" he cried. "What a fine girl it is! You'll have a real Prince's grandson for a man, and the real thing when it comes to a fight! So long, dearie, and give us a pray while I'm licking that Mick tomorrow."

Fairly dancing with his joy, he rushed out of the lobby while Carola followed him with eyes that seemed to express equal measures of fright, astonishment and laughter. But she had to resume her duties and hide as best she could the agitation that was overcoming her.

A good many people who had noticed the intimate conversation took excuse to come up and, while buying a cigar or the like, ask her opinion of the outcome of the fight. She, knowing the pugilist so well, should have some inside "dope." To these she merely stated that Misteh Kelly seemed very confident, and she had no doubt that he was quite equal to giving a very good account of himself.

As the time drew near for her departure, she busied herself with straightening up her case and with putting on her hat. While her back was turned to the counter during this operation she heard some one approach and tap on the glass. She turned about with her mouth full of hatpins, to face Marty McGuire.

Marty was also laboring under excitement.

"Say, Carrie," he began familiarly. "I got to put you next—see! You've made a hit wi' your Uncle, you have. Say de woid, Kid. Just say it low an' soft, an' little Marty has de ring all ready. And don't you worry dat he can't buy de ice to hang onto you, neither.

"You know dis scrap dat's comin' off tomorrow, Kid. Well, dey t'ink it's all set for a killin', but de chicken dat's due to git de ax ain't goin' to come up to de block. Do you git me? Little Micky is goin' to slip in a double cross of his own on dese wise guys. An' he's goin' to clean up de poise fer himself and cash a bet or two. W'en I hang de kayo on dat Sheeny, I cops big dough, see! And I figger dat de surprise'll be so big and sudden dat I'll have time to fan it back here to de hotel and pick you up before dey find out what's happened to him.

"All you got to do is say de woid, Carrie, an' have yer duds down here ready fer de break, and den we'll make de foist rattler out, an' git de parson at de foist stop. Will you be ready to hit de grit tomorrow, babe?"

A hatpin dropped from Carola's trembling lips and she looked all about as though to escape the boring, sharp little eyes that searched her face. But her own gaze only met the impassive one of Mr. Darrow, the day-clerk, who had assumed his hat and was lifting the gate that shut off the desk from the lobby. She was barely able to utter the words that caused Marty to beam with joy.

"I—I—Oh, yes, Mistah McGuire, I'll sholy be hehe with my things. But won't you please go, now!"

Marty cut a caper of exultation and threw her a kiss from his stubby fingers before he made off with a grin spreading over two-thirds of his countenance. Mr. Darrow, mildly interested in his contortions, watched him to the stairs and then joined Carola.

VI

MR. BURGESS marched importantly into the lobby of the hotel on the final morning and, with great ostentation, sent his card up to Mr. Crabbe. In a few moments, accompanied by several sparring partners and members of his establishment, Abe Bernstein appeared and also awaited the arrival of the other principals.

Mr. Crabbe, followed by Marty McGuire, the latter looking a peculiar mixture of sullenness and secret triumph, arrived a few moments later. Then, with great ostentation, Mr. Burgess drew from a wallet a large bundle of notes and passed them to Mr. Crabbe to be counted. That gentleman ran the ends through his fingers and nodded, passing them to Abe who did likewise. They were then returned to Burgess who handed them, with a receipt, to Mr. Darrow. The latter signed the paper and then slipped the money into an envelope which he sealed with his tongue, afterward placing it in an inside pocket and buttoning his coat over it.

Then every one shook hands and the principals to the combat went their ways, each of the fighters and Mr. Burgess maneuvering, as he passed, so that he might exchange a sign of understanding and affection with Carola. In a few more minutes the lobby was deserted except for the clerk, Carola, and the bell-boys.

The sun was mounting high over Brimstone Bend, and trolley-cars and automobiles, horses and vehicles of all sorts were busily dumping their freight in the vicinity of the race-track. The seats were filling rapidly with humanity of all the kinds and conditions that are interested in sport.

Before an impatient and noisy mob, sweating preliminary boxers went through their appointed performances, whetting the appetites of the spectators for the real sensation. Not even an occasional flow of blood could hold the attention of the fans, and calls were echoing from the stands:

"Take 'em off!" "Get the hook!" "Bring on the big ones!"

At last the final blow of the semi-final bout was struck and the referee held up the hand of the victor, to whom nobody paid any attention. Men wiped up the board floor of the ring and examined the padding on posts and ropes.

Everything was cleared away, and, amidst a storm of applause, Mr. Burgess climbed into the ring. He conversed easily with another man, recognized as an authority on boxing, who had been selected as referee, and seemed absolutely unconscious of the turmoil that filled the seats. The referee nodded and smiled with equal imperturbability.

Boxes containing new gloves were tossed into the ring, and then a large pair of scales was rolled down an aisle and hoisted to the platform. Excitement mounted higher.

Abraham Bernstein, otherwise "Young Kelly, Welterweight Champion of the World" sauntered down the aisle, shaking hands right and left with his admirers. Behind him trooped his seconds and assistants carrying towels and sponges.

He was stripped to trunks and boxing-shoes and bareheaded, though his shoulders were covered by a flannel bath-gown which was allowed to flap negligently open. His hands were swathed in bandages of adhesive tape.

He climbed to the platform and walked mincingly over the boards, testing them with springy pushes of his toes. His seconds set a chair in a corner for him and arranged bucket, towels and sponge where they would be handy. A shallow box of rosin was placed in front of the chair.

Then Marty McGuire, amid an uproar of applause, appeared and pushed his way through the people, who rose from their seats and reached out to him, endeavoring to touch him or slap him on the shoulder while cries of "Attaboy, Marty!" "Oh, you Kid!" "How long you goin' to let 'im stay, boy?" and other expressions of confidence and admiration told plainly where the sympathy and money of the majority lay.

Marty's face was lowered and he seemed to be anxious to avoid the reception as much as possible, shaking off the clutching hands and pushing rapidly to the ring. Mr. Crabbe, now clad in a sweater, followed and another man carried the paraphernalia. Marty wore no dressing-gown, but was swathed in a sweater and wore drawers of knee length. His hands were also bandaged.

Bernstein dropped his bath-robe to the chair and stepped carefully on the scales. They wavered and settled at the exact weight required. He stepped off, and Marty, without removing his sweater, jumped carelessly on. The balance jumped up with his spring and then crashed back, remaining unmoved. Evidently he was well under weight. The fact did not seem to disturb him at all.

The referee walked to the ropes and held up his hand while the fighters lounged beside him and at some distance, the referee being between them.

"Ladees and gemp'men!" the man shouted. "This bout is a fight between Young Kelly, welterweight champeen, an' Marty McGuire, better known to all as "Murderin' Marty," the peerless champeen of the world in the lightweight class. The bout will be fought to a finish, London rules prevailin', and the breaks will be clean. The purse is ten thousand dollars, and *the winner takes all!* Ladees and gemp'men—Young Kelly, welterweight champeen!"

Young Kelly, with a handsome smile, bowed to the four points of the compass, and a scattering hand-patter told that he had followers among the devotees of sport.

The referee waved a grandiloquent arm toward the stubby figure on his other hand.

"Murderin' Marty, Lightweight Champeen of the World!" he bellowed, and the sky rocked with the cheers that answered, as McGuire ducked spasmodically to one side and then to the other.

When the turmoil had somewhat subsided the referee read a telegram from some fighter or other who challenged the winner and offered any inducement for an acceptance. Cat-calls and hoots answered this. Then "Kid Walcott," whom Bernstein had already whipped, sprang to the center of the ring and defied either or both of the principals to repeat that feat.

The great fighters, both smiling contemptuously, took their seats, and their seconds busied themselves with their preparations.

Marty McGuire, when the gloves had been picked over by the seconds, walked to Abe's chair and examined his opponent's bandages while Abe did the same for his. Then both settled themselves while their seconds leaped from the ring. The referee, coatless and anxious, looked around him—and the bell rang.

BOTH men were out of their seats and in the center of the ring before their alert seconds had jerked the chairs through the ropes. They shook hands, the referee walked between them and turned.

Abe minced a few steps, while McGuire lowered his head and screwed his face to an awful grimace. He was solidly poised, his knees bent and his body crouched. One or two in the audience were a bit puzzled at his attitude, but to most of them it was entirely satisfactory and ferocious.

The two men circled cautiously, as if they intended to go slow, realizing that the fight was to be limitless and that there would be plenty of time in which to warm up. But the impatient McGuire evidently found it hard to govern himself and, without warning, suddenly launched himself at Abe, swinging a terrific blow as he came.

Abe deftly danced away from it, shoving his left hand lightly into Marty's face as he did so. Marty shook his head and rushed, flailing away with both hands. The astonished and delighted crowd, not expecting such precipitate action, shook the welkin with cheers.

But Abe, frowning a little, danced lightly away from McGuire, countering accurately, though without much force. Again the Irishman rushed in, bent on smashing his opponent to the ground, and again the wary Hebrew slid out of his reach. His swift left hand pumped precisely into Marty's features at each exchange, and the latter's face began to show red where the gloves peppered him.

He changed his tactics and slowed down, creeping slowly and steadily after his tantalizing enemy, trying to corner him against the ropes. Each time, however, a side-step took Abe out of the trap.

The bell rang with the two in the center of the ring, the Hebrew unmarked, while the Irishman was badly ruffled though evidently not at all damaged by the light blows which had found a lodgment on his features. Yet Abe seemed worried about something as he went to his corner.

In the second round he took a chance on

getting in the way of one of those terrific swings and slid under it, going into a clinch. While the two leaned fondly upon each other, he whispered in Marty's ear:

"Slow up, you fool! This is a finish fight!"

"You bet, an' I know it!" muttered Marty grimly, as he shook himself free.

The audience thought the two were exchanging compliments and yelled its approval. They fairly screamed with glee as Marty, once free, settled himself and launched another fearful attack. So suddenly did he do this that Abe, caught unawares, had barely time to hunch a shoulder and take the buffet on that and the top of his head. It ruffled his hair, and when his face reappeared it was flushed and angry.

Marty gave him no rest. He ran wildly in, thrashing out with right and left.

Abe, with caution startled out of him, tried to run into another clinch and got a blow fair in the side, though so high that it did no real damage except to jar him. It swung him around, however, and Marty was quick to seize his advantage. He leaped in, swinging, and rushed Abe, who covered up as best he could, right across the ring, smashing away tirelessly.

The ropes stopped the retreat, and Abe shifted his feet for a glide out of danger. But he had let Marty come too close, and instead of slipping past the flying fists he walked square into a right-hand jolt which connected solidly with his ear.

The shrieking crowd went mad as the welterweight champion toppled to the floor under the blow of the great Murdering Marty.

Abe raised himself on an elbow and looked at McGuire as the referee rushed to his side and, with one hand holding back the lightweight, tolled off the seconds.

"One—two—three," he counted slowly, and the bell rang.

Certainly Abe was not much hurt. He leaped at once to his feet, smiled disdainfully at the crowd and sat down, exchanging a laughing and confident remark with one of his seconds.

But the audience thought that it was all over. Men leaped to their feet and offered to bet round dollars against plugged cents on McGuire. Across the ring Marty glowered, while Crabbe remonstrated with him. The champion shook his head sullenly to all his manager had to say, and the latter turned away, directing a look at Abe and shrugging his shoulders. The Hebrew frowned as he noticed this.

The third round was to be for blood. Not one had a doubt of this. Bets were freely made that the affair would be over in ten rounds or less. But, to everybody's surprise, it was Abe who rushed from his chair at the bell and hastened to the clash, while Marty rather hung back and proceeded with caution.

It may have been well that he did, for Abe swept down on him, skilful and dangerous. There were to be no more light blows struck while going away. Instead, he danced into range, poised, while McGuire crouched, swung his fist back and forth a few times as though measuring the length of its reach, and then jabbed swiftly and viciously.

The blow landed flush on Marty's jaw and rocked his head backward. He broke ground, straightening partially and wiping the air with a futile, awkward swing which was blocked a foot from Abe's head. The counter flashed at once and reached Marty's body, driving him further backward. He went on until the ropes stopped him in his turn. But he evidently knew little about how to avoid the danger. All he could do was to lower his head and rush frantically at his antagonist.

Abe slid gracefully around the catapult rush, and uppercut viciously at the stooped face that went past him. Marty turned and rushed again, groping with his arms, getting another straight and stinging left in the face as Bernstein stooped into the clinch.

The referee rushed between them, and Abe smiled unpleasantly as he stepped back. The crowd was silent, astonished that their idol should have so suddenly been made to look like an amateur.

There were no more offers of bets. When the round was over Abe walked lightly back to his place while McGuire shuffled sullenly to his own.

In the fourth round and in the fifth the affair took the same course. Now and then a wild swing of the lightweight found a mark and jarred the Hebrew, but never seriously enough to place him in jeopardy, while his own wicked jabs were mercilessly cutting the champion to ribbons. The latter plodded on grimly, taking his punishment and boring in for more, but he seemed to have lost all the fire that had marked his first efforts and to be merely fighting in the hope of landing a lucky punch that would put Abe away. The audience was puzzled at this reversal of form, and murmurs began to be audible.

They seemed to intimidate Abe to some extent and to awaken Marty. When the sixth round was signaled he once more leaped to the attack, his teeth showing and his face twisted, though his appearance was rather more desperate than terrifying.

Abe, meeting him confidently, stood up to him in the center of the ring and for once threw his science away as though to show that he was not overawed by the reputation of his enemy. He ducked the first swing and hooked his own glove into Marty's ribs. Instead of clinching at this point, he planted both feet and, with hair flying, met the hail of frantic blows with others as thunderous and far more accurate.

The astonished and yelling crowd saw Marty's fists land again and again, but instead of beholding the downfall of Abe they perceived him stand under them unflinching and send his own hands smashing into face and body of the champion. The foes stamped solidly across the springing boards and grunted with their exertions, heaving shoulders and twisting backs marking the force which they put into the deadly blows.

Again and again the gloves landed with sharp smacks or dull thuds, and the flesh that they fell on puffed red and angry beneath them.

Marty's face was cut and bleeding, while Abe's eye was nearly closed. A terrible punch that barely missed McGuire's jaw took a part of his ear with it and the blood spattered over them both. It seemed a miracle that either could stand to this work, but they battered away tirelessly until the bell once more sent them to their corners, where they sat with heaving chests, lolling with arms over the ropes while the seconds fanned them and spat water over their red and gleaming bodies. As for the crowd, it had gone wild and crazy with delight.

Once more the bell called them to the battle. Yet it was the despised Abe that sprang fiercely from his seat and rushed to the attack, while the terrible McGuire seemed to be almost reluctant to resume, and when he got on his feet, was noticeably slow in leaving his corner. There was a look of hopeless resolution on his face, and his partisans knew that he was beaten—unless, as some of them hoped, he was stalling and leading the Hebrew into a trap.

There was some color lent to this theory by his actions. Abe had danced in front of him, shifting from side to side and watching the best moment for a rush and a blow that would settle things. Suddenly Marty poised himself and with a convulsive and terrible contortion of face and body, launched an awful blow from his hip.

Abe set himself and struck, lightly, swiftly, with delicate skill. His left hand jabbed easily into the shoulder of the lightweight, just at the end of the collarbone, long before the blow could land. And, though the force of the stroke would hardly have broken an egg, it was sufficient to turn the cataclysm from its course and to throw Marty far off his balance, aided by his own mighty effort.

His head and body bent after his arm and his feet crossed as he swung around. Then Abe planted his feet deliberately and struck with his right hand. The blow hooked across Marty's shoulder and flush upon the unprotected angle of his jaw. He dropped as if he had been pole-axed.

The crowd was on its feet and rushing the ring. Those in front fought it back lest it trample them. Chairs were flying and oaths being hurled back and forth.

The referee tolled off the count, while Abe watched the struggle underneath him anxiously and impatiently, as if hastening to be off. Somewhere in the crowd a pistol cracked, and Abe turned pale beneath the red spots on his features.

"Ten!" yelled the referee and, rising from the prostrate McGuire, seized Abe's glove and held his hand aloft.

VII

MR. CRABBE was waiting. He had slipped from the ring before the last blow was struck and gone out behind the dressing-rooms. There was an automobile there, and the manager of McGuire had taken his place at the wheel.

The noise that burst from the enclosure seemed to worry him. His face was pale and his eyes restless as he swept the doors beneath the grand stand in vain search for his principals. It seemed that they would never arrive, and the engine of the machine was getting hot as he raced it in preparation for their advent.

At last they came. Abe Bernstein burst through the door to the dressing-rooms, clad in trousers and undershirt, carrying coat and collar over one arm, the hand of which held a bag which gaped open. He half-dragged, half-carried the staggering form of Marty McGuire, who probably had not yet recovered sufficiently to help himself.

Marty had Abe's bath-robe draped over him, and continually stepped on the edge of it and lurched forward, thus adding to Abe's difficulties.

At this point loud cries of "Fake!" "Give us our money!" served to quicken the group.

Mr. Crabbe leaped to the ground and assisted Abe to throw Marty into the machine. The bag followed, Abe's coat and collar and shirt followed that, and Abe himself was next. Mr. Crabbe was in the front at the wheel and the machine responded to his manipulation, getting into high in remarkably short order and taking the turns until the road was reached as if it had entered a race.

On the road the same illusion was kept up. Mr. Crabbe drove desperately and without heed to speed laws or limits. Behind him Abraham Bernstein cursed piously and forcefully, directing his remarks at the still groggy McGuire.

"It's a nice mess already that you've got us in!" he said, among other things. "What for did you want to go in like you was making it a killing? By Moses! I thought it would be a good-night for Abey when you landed that haymaker on me. And it was to be a finish fight, and you haven't no better sense than to go out as if you was fighting a four-round prelim. Oi, oi! A finish fight! Seven rounds only, and I had to knock you cold as a smelt, you low Irisher! What for did you do it?"

"G'wan!" said Marty sullenly and feebly. "You wasn't goin' to make me the goat if I knew it!"

"Make you the goat!" screamed Abe. "What is it, I make you the goat? Ain't it the truth that you ain't got the sense of a goat yet? Oi, oi! Actually it's a fact. Holy, this guy thinks he could lick me and tried to do it! You saw it yourself, Holy. Now, ain't it a fact?"

"Yah!" snorted Mr. Crabbe in disgust. "I seen it and beat it to get the wagon ready for the getaway. And I heard pistols crackin' and guys yellin' 'Fake' and 'Give us our money,' and I knew what we were up against. And the train leaves at six-fifteen, and it's only two-thirty now. Nearly four hours—and it don't take nowheres near that long to get up a lynching down in these parts."

"Ain't there an earlier train," moaned Abe.

"There's one at three sharp—but its eight miles if it's a foot, and I donno if we can make it."

"We got to make it!" said Abe fervently.

Crabbe responded by opening his throttle another notch.

"I don't care if we don't make it," groaned McGuire. "I don't get off nowhere, nohow."

"You!" snorted Abe. "Low life! We could leave you to be strung up and not shed a weep for you!"

Marty sniffled and shrouded himself in aching gloom.

The miles flowed behind them and no sounds of pursuit could be detected. But they knew that motors would be on the road behind them, and those pistol-shots spoke sharply of the temper of the crowd.

They were taking no chances, and kept up their dizzy gait until the streets of Fort Jones were under their tires. Even then they did not hesitate to defy the speed ordinance, and came up to the hotel so fast that the brakes were barely able to bring them to a stop and the slipping tires smoked on the pavement.

THEY sprang out, even Marty McGuire displaying some alacrity. Into the lobby they rushed, looking anxiously for signs that might tell them whether any one had thought to anticipate them by telephone. Apparently none had, for the place was calm. Only a fat man stood behind the clerk's desk, while a traveling salesman leaned over it and conversed.

The three men rushed to the desk.

"Where is this Darrow fellow?" cried Abe, the spokesman for the trio.

The fat man glared at the remarkable costumes exhibited to his gaze.

"Gosh!" he said. "It's the pugs!"

"Tell us quick, where is this feller?" screamed Abe frantically.

The fat man was galvanized.

"Him!" he said. "He jumped his job this morning without giving me a chance to get a man in his place. Darn his picture! He left on the two-sixteen for El Paso, where he said he had a better job. I hope he chokes on it!"

"Gone!" groaned the fighter. "Gone! And did he leave me anything?"

The fat man, who seemed to be the proprietor of the hotel, pulled a bulky envelope from a pigeonhole and handed it to Abe.

"Said to give you this when you came in. 'Abe Bernstein!' Is that your name?"

"You betcha it is!" said Abe, and grabbed the package.

His relief and delight were boundless, and he blessed the honesty of the clerk who had fulfilled his trust even though leaving his job.

He crammed the envelope into his pocket and turned to the cigar-counter, expecting to see Carola there and waiting for him. But his eyes encountered the black face of a bell-boy.

"Oi, oi!" he cried. "Where is the lady?"

"Well, if it's any interest to you," said the proprietor impatiently, "she flew the coop with Darrow. They went and got married this morning, and she came down here with all her grips and things ready to go with him. You can't rely on no one, no more."

Abe looked at Marty and Marty looked back at Abe. The latter cursed deeply and awfully. The faint and distant sound of an engine whistling for a crossing was borne to their ears.

These two would have let it pass unheeded, but the anxious Crabbe would not allow it. He grasped them by the arms.

"Beat it!" he growled. "You've got the coin. What are you waitin' for—a lynching party?"

They yielded to his insistence and followed him from the hotel. He led the way at a run toward the station, and they were lucky enough to arrive in time to catch the train just as it was getting under way.

Heedless of the stares of the outraged passengers, they sought the sleeper and ensconced themselves in a stateroom. Although still dazed at Carola's defection, Abe sought consolation in examining their loot.

As for Marty, from the time he had realized the hopelessness of winning the fight, he had dismissed the girl from his calculations, and was therefore only affected by satisfaction that Abe, at least, should have failed to win her.

The three leaned over the envelope when Abe drew it from his pocket. He opened it beneath their eyes and drew from it a roll of blank paper and a note. Then he cursed again, more frightfully than before.

It was Crabbe who picked up the note and read it.

MESSRS. BERNSTEIN, SIMPSON AND DEVLIN:

DEAR SIRS:

You probably do not remember that I was formerly a clerk at the Munich Hotel in Saint Louis, but I remember your party very well indeed. Mr. Devlin's close resemblance to the noted champion McGuire was also very well known to me, as was the fact that he has already impersonated that gentleman on several occasions. I recognized Mr. Holy Simpson at once, and so was not deceived by Mr. Devlin.

I regret that pressing business calls my wife and myself away, and that I can not remain to help the adjustment of the matter in which I was commissioned. As for the sums placed in my charge, I have considered carefully. It occurs to me that the said sums were deposited for the purpose of being paid to the winner of a fight between Mr. Bernstein and Mr. McGuire.

As Mr. Bernstein has not fought Mr. McGuire, I can hardly hand him the money, if, as I presume he will, he wins the present combat. I would, of course, return the sum to the depositors, but I understand that they intended it for a purse for a finish fight, which is against the law. Therefore I feel that I would be a party to the crime if I disposed of it in that way.

I can not make up my mind what to do with it. So, for the present, at least, I shall keep it in custody. If any of the claimants to same care to appear in El Paso—where, I have heard, Mr. Bernstein and Mr. Simpson are anxiously looked for in connection with another little episode of similar character—I shall be happy to listen to any arguments they may have at command.

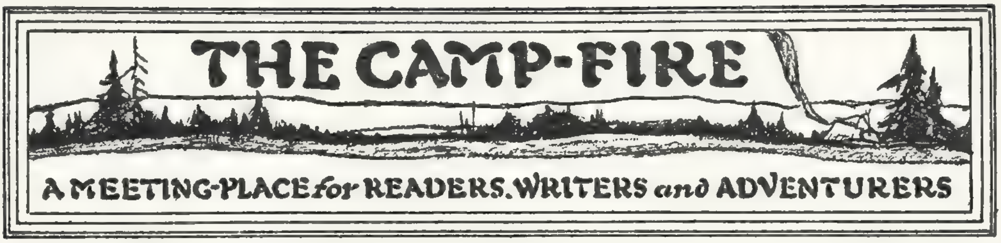
In the meantime, Mrs. Darrow sends her kindest regards and begs me to assure Mr. Bernstein and Mr. Devlin that she was at the hotel with her bags, but that she could not wait for them.

Very truly,
JAMES W. DARROW.

Abe sat stunned for five minutes. The uniformed person of the conductor making his way through the car enlivened him.

"What are we doing in a stateroom?" he moaned. "It's the day-coach smoker for us!"

They gathered what baggage they had and wended their dejected ways forward.



THE CAMP-FIRE

A MEETING-PLACE for READERS, WRITERS and ADVENTURERS

THE following contains some interesting information in reply to our query some time ago about the Senussi, the Mohammedan secret order of which so little is really known and which may be a small affair or a very big one with decided international importance. It bears out the claim that at their headquarters in the oasis of Jof in northern Africa they are preparing for big things, have their own arsenal, etc.

> Now I know very little about it, if I knew *much* I would not tell, but one little incident which I saw I give you for what it is worth.
>
> I was in Morocco (perhaps Mr. Holt will remember the very fresh American who would insist on going into the interior with only a native guide) and went well into the back country from Tangiers.
>
> ONE evening just at sunset a native came up to the tent and, after considerable talk with Mohammed, produced a Luger aut., that had a broken spring. I looked at the gun and found that it had been mended twice and that it was made up of the parts of two different guns (as per numbers), and I asked him how that happened and who put it together. He said something to Mohammed in the native dialect and that something made Mohammed angry, after he had used the words "Jof" or "Jeuf" and "Senussiyeh" a couple of times. Mohammed told me the man was a bad man, was crazy, was a thief, etc., etc., and sent him away with the gun *unfixed*.
>
> Later I asked Mohammed what was the row about the Senussi, and he said, "Oh, the crazy pig didn't know what he was talking about. The Senussi is a big secret order, very old but now going out. It is sort of holy man's club."
>
> *But* the next morning the native was found with his throat cut, half a mile from camp. This may be coincidence, but it suggests to me an armory of some sort with skilled smiths and also that very close "tab" is kept on loose-tongued people.—ROGER WARD.
>
> Why not ask the author of "The Barbary Coast" what he knows of it?

DURING the seven months, October, 1914 to May, 1915, that Mr. Schayer served in the British Army Service Corps as a private, his duties brought him in touch with every phase of the operations in northern France. The greater part of the time he worked in the Remount Depot of the big British Base at Rouen, France. About once a fortnight it would come his turn to go to the trenches with supplies—horses, ammunition or rations. His experiences under fire he has written for a syndicate of Sunday newspapers. That all the material for gripping stories about the war is not confined to the actual zone of fire is proved by his story of life in the Remount Depot at Christmas time, 1914, which we have in this issue:

> Every detail is fact up to the reading of the letter at old *Fullick's* death-bed. As it really happened, the letter from his wife came a day or so after the old chap cashed in.

THE following letter is about grasshopper-pie. And other things. The writer is with the U. S. Signal Corps.

> Fort Wm. McKinley, Rizal, P. I.
>
> Looks a little like the Philippine Islands would have independence soon, but if some of the people higher up could *know* and see some conditions here they would hesitate, I think. Independence for a people who *like* fish the way they come out of the water, and grasshoppers! And for head-hunters! Grasshopper-pie is quite a delicacy in most communities. Do you think people can be changed from breech-clouts to a more complete covering—to so-called civilization?
>
> By the way, the camp at Texas City, Texas, was blown completely away. We lost everything we had. Had to "draw" an outfit to come here with and then get a complete outfit on arrival here. We "put in" for damages before we left there, but I wonder if we get it? I had overdrawn $1 and this one set me back a little over $26.00, which will be taken out of my monthly stipend, which is sad, seeing as how *I* didn't order that derned old hurricane!—I. D. card 1586.

HERE'S a belated bit out of a letter from our old friend and contributor, Major W. Robert Foran, written about November 1st, when he was back in England recovering from wounds received in France. It gives news of two other members of the Chicago chapter of the Adventurers' Club.

Word comes from Captain Franklin of the Chicago chapter that Major Foran has returned to the front. Also that Philip Samson, another Chicago Adventurer, is back from France badly wounded.

I met John Bass, *Chicago Daily News* war correspondent in London this week. He's a Chicago Adventurer. Also I met Captain J. H. Anderson, 18th Hussars. He's also a Chicago member who returns this week, I believe. I shall make for the U. S. A. as soon as the war is over and am looking forward to a joyous meeting with you and all over there. . . . If you have any copies to spare I'm sure my men would love to have *Adventure* sent to them.

JUNGLE fever, coast fever, tropical fever, whatever name it may take, there are many of you who know it. Listen, then, to one of us who is a doctor and has found a treatment that has brought good results in his own experience. Our Camp-Fire is at its best when it serves as a means of passing on to the rest of us something one of our members has found valuable and useful.

While remembering that you are not editing a medical magazine, I have an item of therapeutic interest that could hardly help being of great value to some outfit in a tropical country.

Tropical malaria (the "Jungle Fever" of Malaya and India—and the "Coast Fever" of Africa) is, as you know, the pest of all outfits working in tropical countries. Its death-rate is enormous to Europeans, and, when it does not kill quickly, it leaves its victim a wreck for many months, often years.

WHILE serving as the resident physician in the old Bangrak Hospital in Bangkok, Siam, I saw some natives treating a case of high fever. By throwing water of ordinary temperature over the patient, and depending on evaporation to cool the blood, they kept the temperature down below 103 degrees F., where all the anti-pyretic drugs I dared give the patient had little or no effect on it at 105 to 106 degrees F.

Later on I experimented with the idea and found that I could get as good results, without the slop and necessary nurses, by covering the patient with a wet sheet or very light-weight blanket, wet, and gently fanning a current of air over it to get the cooling evaporation.

We all remember how quickly and safely we can cool off our over-heated bodies by holding one's hands and wrists in cool water—well, it is practically that.

ALL these fevers attack the organs of the body quickly, and hospital practise shows that a fever patient gets along far better, with fewer complications and sequelae if the body temperature is kept down.

Out in a jungle with no ice, this simple suggestion of a wet sheet makes the care of a sick comrade far easier and his safety multiplied times greater.

In localized fevers, like broken bones, sprains, bruises, bullet-wounds, and the like, it would be of greatest value used locally. And if the ordinary "Extract of Witch-Hazel" can be used instead of the water, in these cases small miracles can be worked.

I believe that this letter would be of value to your readers.

Continuous evaporation secured with a wet sheet and a current of air is its simplest form.—WILLIAM R. LEE, M.D., Los Angeles, Calif.

THE RED-HEADED REGIMENT

LAST month you read letters from a few of those who have enrolled in our Red-Headed Regiment. They showed the kind of men who are joining. The large majority of them have seen service in our army, navy, marine corps or militia. If the red-heads are ever called upon to serve our country on the firing-line, no regiment will give a better account of itself.

It isn't for nothing that red-heads have a world-wide reputation for their fighting qualities. If to their natural ability they add the skill, hardening, training and experience that only real work as soldiers or sailors can give to men, then their fighting value is raised many, many degrees. Now, on top of all that, take a thousand and more of such fighting-men and put them together in a single fighting unit. You who have seen active service know what that will mean. Being with some twelve hundred more of his own kind will make each red-head a still more effective fighting-man by a big margin, and will make of them all together a fighting unit that will write its name at the top of the scroll that records the deeds done in our country's wars.

It's worth doing.

MANY more men are still needed. As stated above, most of those enrolled are men who are already trained soldiers and have seen active service. (It is significant that it is the experienced fighting-men who have been first to see the practical value and advantages of the Red-Headed Regiment.) But the regiment is open to men who have not yet been trained, and lucky is the recruit who can go to the front in a regiment the majority of whose men are seasoned veterans.

Also, any regiment organized before war breaks out is far more likely to get quickly to the firing-line than are the volunteers who are not organized into regiments until the war has actually begun. And still more likely to get quick action instead of many months in training-camp if most of that regiment are already veterans.

If you are a red-head, join now. Then

bring in your red-headed friends. In these doubtful times no one knows when need may arise for volunteers for war. There is no better way for you to go than with your fellow red-heads of the Red-Headed Regiment.

It's up to you, red-heads. Send in your names for enrollment.

BACK ISSUES OF *ADVENTURE*

1911 (1, 3, 4, 5); 1912 (6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12); 1913 (1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12); 1914 (1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12). All of 1915. 20c ea. back of 1912; 15c ea. 1913; 10c ea. 1914 and '15. A few covers missing but contents intact. Will sell whole or not less than six assorted copies and pay half the freight west of Mississippi.—Address A. HERSCHIN, 38 Rosemoat Place, San Francisco, Cal.

Vol. 1, No. 1 to date.—Address W. B. PHILLIP, West Peabody, Mass.

IT ISN'T often I make the Camp-Fire listen to "boosts" for the magazine—indeed, many of you know from personal experience that any compliments or kind words for *Adventure* are carefully cut out from your letters before they go into type for the rest to read. So perhaps, since we print free notices for those who wish to sell back copies of the magazine, we may be allowed to print one from a man who won't sell them. (I remember, now, that I went and did this once before!)

I notice in your last issue of *Adventure* a demand for old issues. I have not missed one month as yet and in my bookcase one can see *Adventure*, Vol. 1, No. 1, November, 1910, right up to Vol. XI, No. 2, December, 1915. Although the offers made by your correspondents of $1.00 per dozen and 15c per issue are tempting enough, I could not bring myself to part with my collection, as it is my intention to present the whole set to my son and heir as soon as he is old enough to read *good clean* fiction like what is found in your magazine. I do a little roaming myself occasionally, but always manage to get *Adventure* every month as soon as it is on the stand.

I note that the Montreal Branch Adventurers' Club has gone out of existence and no wonder—all of the adventurers in this city are in the firing-line in France doing their bit, but we hope to see them again some time.—A. H. RICHARDSON, Montreal, Canada.

LETTER-FRIENDS

Note—This is a service for those of our readers who want some one to write to. For adventurers afield who want a stay-at-home "letter bunkie," and for stay-at-homes, whether ex-adventurers or not, who wish to get into friendly touch with some one who is out "doing things." We publish names and addresses—the rest is up to you, and of course we assume no responsibility of any kind. Women not admitted.

(20) Pte. Charles Milton, No. 207130, A Company, 97th Batt., C. E. F., Toronto, Canada.

(21) Edw. Holmes Norris, 613 Saint Ann Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland.

(22) Edward Gutteridge, 710 Buchanan St., Amarillo, Tex., wants to hear from soldiers or civilians in Hawaii or any out-of-the-way corners.

(23) Frank W. Ryan, 38 N. Maple Avenue, East Orange, N. J.

(24) Saul Haas, 854 E. 167th Street, New York City.

A LETTER from the trenches—Harry C. Winters—with a message to those of you who have written to him:

France.

A brief note to let you know I have not forgotten you. I have had few facilities for writing you of late, but take the will for the deed and let it go at that.

Your notice in the magazine brought me quite a number of correspondents whom in my name I wish you to thank. I shall endeavor to answer them all later on if only with a postcard. I do not wish them to think I am forgetful of their kindness in writing to a wanderer, but truth to tell, I have not had either time or opportunity. The ones I wished to get in touch with, however, have not yet materialized, but *quien sabe*, perhaps later on.

Your case of magazines arrived O. K. early in the year, and I had great pleasure in sending them to the wounded in the hospitals, and I have no doubt that they whiled away many weary hours.

WITH the approach of Christmas, the weather has turned bitterly cold and we are feeling the effects of it. But it is no use growling; it is all in the joke. Things are very quiet along the Western front, that is, quiet as compared to the last few months when Friend Fritz was quite busy. The game is here, but I expect that, locked in as he is, Uncle Bill will soon begin to feel the pinch. It is miraculous the way they are hanging on. I shall have some great copy for you later on. At present it is impossible. I hope, however, in the near future to be across the Pond and will pay you a call if I win through all safe.—HARRY C. WINTERS.

SOME news about Theodore Goodrich Roberts, one of our writers and a member of our Camp-Fire:

I noticed the little bit about your not hearing from Theodore Goodrich Roberts. As it happens, the Robertses are old friends of ours, as we lived in Frederickton, N. B., Canada, their father being Canon of St. Anne's Parish and ours Dean of the Cathedral. My "big" brother, who is at present a lieutenant in the Aeroplane Corps of the R. N. V. R., ran into Thede at Shorncliffe. Thede was at the time a lieutenant in one of the Canadian regiments stationed there. Since then he has been appointed assistant to the official Eye Witness. Perhaps this is stale news to you, but at any rate there's no harm in telling you.—JACK B. PARTRIDGE, Rochester, N. Y.

YOU will remember that we had a letter from an American who spoke of seeing Japanese cruisers at the "Japanese naval base at Turtle Bay," and later a letter from a man on a Canadian war-ship who said the idea was all bosh. Here is a letter which makes it look very little like bosh:

As I happen to be the fellow who started all the uproar about the Japanese being in Turtle Bay, Lower California, Mexico, by "breaking the story" on April 15 of last year in the Los Angeles *Times*, I read with much interest the letter from a British officer published in your magazine of this month.

As to the Japanese being in Turtle Bay I ask no one to believe me. I have over two hundred pictures, which I took myself while in the bay, to prove what I say. I might say by the way also that a set of the pictures was given by me to the United States Federal Officers of this city upon their request, after they had appeared in my paper.

I SPENT over a month in the waters about Turtle Bay during the investigation of the Japs which I made for the *Times*, and I know what I am talking about. With me during the trip was Hubert Kittle of this city, ex-petty officer of the United States Navy. What we saw in Turtle Bay and the trouble we were put to by the Japanese is a matter which has been taken up from both sides by almost every newspaper in the country.

In regard to what ships were in Turtle Bay I have only this to say. When we sailed into the bay we saw the Japanese cruisers *Isuma*, *Tokioba*, *Chitose* and *Asama* (the latter alleged to be wrecked), as well as one other cruiser which left as we entered the bay and whose name we were unable to learn. Also the British colliers *Lena* and *Protesilaus* of Liverpool and the Japanese colliers *Penang Maru* and *Kamakura* of Tokyo.

On land we saw—and also had much trouble with—a number of thousand Japanese sailors who seemed to be having things much their own way. We also went through their camp and were detained there some time. Everything looked as if it was there to stay. We saw a small wireless station and a huge amount of ammunition—all on shore.

I WISH also to state that I never said the Japanese were establishing a base at Turtle Bay. I stated what I saw in the bay and asked the question: "What are the Japanese doing in Turtle Bay?" As to the base, every one can form his own opinion, but I ask again, What were the Japanese doing in the bay?

My own opinion of the matter is that the Japanese ships were in the bay waiting for possible trouble with this country over the Chinese question which was coming up at that time. However that may be, they were there.

In regard to the officer from his Majesty's Canadian ship, I have this much to say: I am afraid he doesn't know what he is talking about. (For the last remark I beg his pardon, but I had to say it.) Also, I can name his ship, unless I am sadly mistaken, and also now have a picture of her in my possession as she lay in Turtle Bay with a number of Japanese ships about her.

I DON'T ask any one to believe me. As I have already stated, I have pictures to prove everything that I have said.—ALBERT F. NATHAN, The *Times*, Los Angeles, Calif.

TO AVOID confusions and misunderstanding, it should be made plain that there are two American Legions. First, the American Legion started by us of the Camp-Fire, now a national organization with a large membership. Its sole purpose is national defense, and it can be called into active service only by the United States Government. Second, an organization that is part of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Its official name is the 97th Overseas Battalion, but it is popularly known as the American Legion.

Needless to say, the two organizations have no connection whatsoever. When I heard of the Canadian battalion I instituted inquiries and received from correspondents in Canada the following information:

LAST Fall, at a meeting of the American Club of Toronto, some one suggested raising a battalion to be composed exclusively of Americans or former Americans. The Canadian Government co-operated, and recruiting began about December 1st. By January 9th, the date of one of my letters of information, they had 750 men, with more recruits constantly arriving. Their colors consist of the Stars and Stripes and the Union Jack, crossed, and their badge is the Canadian maple-leaf bearing the coat of arms of George Washington.

One of my informants is himself a member of this 97th Battalion and his name appears this month in our Letter-Friends department — Charles Milton, whose only complaint at present is that they can't go to the front at once.

SOONER or later some one will rise up and charge that our American Legion is violating neutrality, so I want each of you to know that the Canadian organization has no more connection with our Legion than it has with the National Baseball League. Indeed, our Legion is not only neutral, but feels regret over every eligible American who goes to the front on either side, believing there is a chance that the time may come when our country may need his services and need them badly. A dead American, or even an absent one, is not of much use to his country in such an emergency.

OUR identification cards remain free to any reader. The two names and addresses and a stamped envelope bring you one.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of ADVENTURE, New York, U. S. A., stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. The names and addresses will be treated as confidential by us. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for purposes of business identification. Later, arrangements may perhaps be made for money deposits to cover cable or telegraph notifications. Cards furnished free of charge, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application. Send no applications without the two names and two addresses in full.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later, for the cost of manufacture, we may furnish, instead of the above cards, a card or tag, proof against heat, water and general wear and tear, for adventurers when actually in the jungle, desert, etc.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give the two names and addresses in full when applying.*

LISTEN to what happened to the Nogales chapter of the Adventurers' Club. The news reached me in a letter from Basil D. Woon, of the Nogales and previously of the New York chapter and at that time, January, a newspaper correspondent in Mexico. It is quite plain that Mr. Woon himself has been having considerable excitement, but he doesn't go into that at length.

After having received my last letter, full of enthusiasm about the Nogales chapter of the Adventurers' Club, you will probably be surprised to hear from me in San Antonio, but there's a reason. The truth is, the adventurers who comprised our membership in Nogales are nearly all adventuring. There aren't enough left to get through any formal business.

First, Edgar S. O'Reilly left for New York. I've heard he is with you now, or Rex Beach. Present my regards if so. Then various of our other members dropped off, some of them going into Mexico, one back to the Orient, a few to the Coast and several eastward.

THERE are still left, of course, those members who have businesses of their own in Nogales, but these are few, and those of us who were merely working there or waiting for something to turn up have nearly all drifted away. Charley Clarke is still there, but then Charley committed the supreme adventure last August and got married. Casey Cotter and his brogue are still working for the Southern Pacific, I believe, and perhaps one or two others, such as "Still Bill" Hugh Bryan, positively the most silent man in the world, who is cowpunching on the Barbacomari ranch, are there yet. But where Jack Noonan, sourdough and border will-o'-the-wisp, Bill Holt, soldier of fortune (ask Tex O'Reilly about that fight he and Holt pulled off in front of the Cave on Calle Elias once), Adams and the others are, I don't know. Oh, yes, By-God Jaggers is, I heard, at Empalme, Mexico, and Billy Codey, of corrals fame, is selling horses somewhere, somebody told me.

SO YOU see, we've split up. The original Nogales Adventurers' Club has disintegrated. Whether we'll ever all get together again around the festive board only Time will tell, but when I think of the two never-to-be-forgotten occasions on which we dined and generally made merry in Nogales, and how the last one wound up, I feel it in my heart to breathe a fervent wish that somewhere, somehow, the God who controls our destinies will arrange to bring us once more together.

Now, mind, don't accept this as formal notice that the Nogales Adventurers' Club is no more. I don't know whether it is or not. When I left I surrendered my office of secretary to Alphonso Pellegrin, from whom I have not since heard. They may have got a few together at another dinner, but in case you should wonder what has become of us all I am writing you this letter.—BASIL D. WOON.

ABOUT the first of the year the following letter reached me, with a message for some of you, from Thomas Melville Ross, one of us who is now an aviator in the English service. Note that he is a member of our American Legion as well as of our Camp-Fire. The snapshot referred to shows him in a hospital bed, looking pretty up-and-coming.

This by way of showing you that I have not yet shuffled off this mortal coil, though I have been close enough to warm my feet at the fire. The enclosed snapshot will give you an idea of my present soft job. It occurred soon after my last letter from you, at the end of a day's flying. Was about 700 feet up when I got it; from that height I side-slipped and nose-dived to earth. Luckily for me, my machine was built according to the latest military requirements; otherwise I should have continued on to where they tell us all good Flyers go.

AS IT was, my right leg was pulped, left side shoulder ditto. I am at present flying a hospital bed, with all the latest equipments, said job not being as easy as it looks anyhow. I hope, if the gods are kind, once more to resume duty before so very long. Must keep my hand in. You will be glad to know that I have just received my membership card from the American Legion.

BY THE way, I had a letter from a newspaper man. As his letter with most of my kit was lost, I can not recall his name. I did not reply for the simple reason that I was unable to, but I should like him to know that it was not from lack of courtesy. I have had lots of letters from readers of Camp-Fire, among them some mighty fine ones. There are some fine *hombres* in our bunch.—THOS. M. ROSS.

NOT long ago one of you asked the Camp-Fire for inside information on the 1915 outbreak among the Piutes, likely to be the last disturbance of any size that history will record of the American Indian. Here is an answer from one who seems to have the real "dope":

I see a request in the Camp-Fire to hear of the trouble in southeastern Utah in regards to the "Piute and Posse." I have been a friend both of the Indians and of the men in the Government employ to bring in Hatch, the so-called bad Indian. I was in both camps during the trouble. I am writing a story of the proceedings (to keep for myself, as I do of every stirring event I participate in), from the killing of Carcon to the freeing of Hatch at his trial in Denver, which I call the "Piute and Posse," which will soon be finished. I will loan it to the Camp-Fire for what they can find useful in it.—L. A. Wilcox, 327 East 1st Street, Salida, Colorado.

AND here is an interesting letter from our friend, Tom L. Mills, editor of the *Fielding Star*, New Zealand, bearing upon our Red-Headed Regiment:

> I like that Redhead Regt. idea. I'm partial to reds. "Ginger for pluck" should be the regiment's motto. The Gurkhas and Sihks of India think there's something in redheads, too. There is the experience of a young New Zealand sergeant, who rescued my son (Sergt. Billy Mills) from the famous Daisy Patch, Krithia Hill, Gallipoli, where Billy had been lying bleeding for eight hours. His rescuer is a big redhead. His dug-out was on the way from the fires where the Indians cooked their specially prepared meals and took them over to their comrades in the trenches. Every one of those Indians stopped in front of redhead's dug-out, made the salaam—and left a mess of pottage. Redhead couldn't understand the rite, and smiled at the obeisance—but he appreciated the welcome change of diet.—Tom L. Mills.

I WANT you to pass on a new stunt for our Camp-Fire which ought to be of practical service to quite a few of you—a little department called "Arrivals and Departures." Its purpose is obvious. When one of you sets out on a real expedition to some far corner, or returns from such an expedition, he may welcome so easy a method of letting his scattered friends know about it. Also, most of us are interested in news of such ventures even when we have no personal touch with them.

Of course there is the point that such notices can not appear in the magazine until a couple of months after the event, but as the department is designed primarily for those on expeditions or ventures covering months or even years of absence, this is not important. It would be particularly valuable at the end of the European war, or for men invalided home before the end. Useful, too, for those of you enlisting in the war.

LET'S try it awhile and see how it works. Don't use it to announce that you've returned to Chicago from your visit in New York. The office ax is ready for all such items. We'll be as just and consistent as we can in passing on notices and you'll have to trust the whole matter to our judgment. Perhaps war notices may flood us beyond the limits of our space; that's one of the things that only experience will settle.

Send in your suggestions. Meanwhile we'll start the ball rolling in this issue.

ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES

Note—The use of this department is free to any of our readers who wishes to announce to his friends and acquaintances his departure with, or return from, an expedition or venture taking him to distant parts for a considerable length of time. Notices from ordinary tourists *not* admitted. Bear in mind that your notice can not get into the magazine for two months after the magazine receives it. We reserve the right to reject any notice whatsoever and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. We assume no responsibility of any kind in conducting this department, but shall do our best to make it of value to our readers.

(1.) H. Miller, writing from S. S. *Pennsylvania*, Dec. 24, notifies his friends of his departure on his prospecting and exploring expedition to Guatemala.

(2.) Capt. George Ash, writing Jan. 7, notifies friends of his sailing Feb. 20, New Orleans to South America.

TIBURON ISLAND, from what I know about it at second-hand, is an extremely interesting place. From the following letter it would appear there is a group of islands bearing this name, though this is news to me. I know it is not an easy place to reach and by all accounts the natives are an amazingly unpleasant lot.

Mr. Snyder and Mr. Shaw met adventure without reaching Tiburon. Our old friend, John A. Avirette, reached it, as set forth in our June, 1911, issue. Have any more of you?

> Pike City, California.
>
> Jack Snyder and myself were members of Dutch Couch's expedition to the Tiburon Islands. We started out from Yuma to prospect the island for gold, but never reached there. The islands lie in the gulf of Lower California and have a very bad name, the natives being hostile and said to be cannibals. We were well armed and equipped to meet trouble. We outfitted at Yuma, building a boat on the Colorado River, and also installed a condenser in a small boat we had in tow. Started on our trip about Thanksgiving, 1914.
>
> When we got to the gulf we ran into a heavy storm and the condenser busted and left us without fresh water, so we headed for land to get more. Leaving our launch about two miles off shore, anchored in thirty feet of water, we took to the small boat. On our way to shore the boat ran on a reef and sank and we swam ashore about one hundred yards. There was no timber to make a raft and nobody wanted to swim out, so we had to abandon the launch and started to hike back to civilization.
>
> A can of flour and a side of bacon came ashore and we all saved our arms, except Snider's six-gun and his hat, which never came ashore. The flour was sealed in a honey-can and, having no cooking tools, we made shift to make tortillas by cutting the can and using it for a frying-pan.
>
> Following the shore line north through the desert hills of the western coast of Mexico and haunted all the time with the fear of running short of water, our food consisted in the most part of broiled ducks and geese, which were plentiful, and tortillas. We came at last to a Pocapo Indian hut and gave him a 30-30 rifle and some smoking-tobacco to guide us to a ford on the Colorado River, a distance of about two hundred miles. From there we made our way to Mexicali and by train to Yuma, arriving on Christmas day, barefooted and in rags, but full of

adventure and experience and hoping to repeat the expedition at a future date.—Jack Snyder and Laurence Shaw.

FROM Manila comes a letter signed "Prospector" which registers a good score in our records of copies of *Adventure* that have done some adventuring on their own hook:

> Manila, P. I.
>
> I've recently returned from a prospecting trip in unexplored Mindora Island and left a copy of the June number with a Manyan chief who treasures it as a charm against witches. The story in that number was called "The Crimson Chamber" and I sure enjoyed it, reading by torch-light in a camp of the wild men. I think no white man—and certainly no American—ever visited that neighborhood before, but perhaps some one will come after me and find that splendid copy of *Adventure*.—"Prospector."

HERE is a letter about "treasure that is neither lost nor found." Now wait! Listen! Hold on a minute, can't you? *Don't* write to me for "further information"! I haven't any. All I know about it I'm giving you right here in the following letter from a man I do not know, but who, evidently, has adventured himself. When you've read that you'll know all I know about it.

> While in Los Angeles I met an acquaintance of better and more adventurous days. A man of little education and large spirit. He was on his way to Mexico, a soldier of fortune. Among the odds and ends of junk such a man gathers was a piece of smooth substance which I recognized as gem coral. I casually asked for the yarn attached to it.
>
> It appears he had been wrecked in a trader on a certain coast and getting ashore with others, had walked through that "damn stuff," picking up a piece as a memento of the experience, not knowing what its value was. I did not enlighten him, but got the locality of the beach within a mile. Now, gem coral necklaces are worth from fifty to two hundred and fifty dollars per, as it is found only in Kobe, Japan. I have placed a scientific check on the story and am convinced that the gem coral *could* be there. Another point is that the story was told casually as an incident of a checkered career and there is absolutely *no* reason for him to have lied to me. To him it was merely a memento of an unpleasant experience.
>
> Here, then, is a fortune waiting for some one to stub his toe over. As I probably shall never be in a position again to "go see," I give you the facts with the exception of the exact locality and the check I put on the story.—Harry F. Wallace, Barbarian Athletic Club, Pacific Bldg., San Francisco, Cal.

THE following speaks for itself:

> As a reader of your magazine for the past two years I never fully realized the value of your identification-cards until recently being injured and lying three days in a hospital unconscious without identification, so kindly send one of your cards to me.—Aylmer F. Henke, Milwaukee.

PLEASE do me a favor. When you use one of the Camp-Fire departments maintained for your benefit, take the trouble to read carefully the note accompanying it. It will save you and us much needless trouble. Also, read our "Information Directory" instead of writing us questions it has already answered.

HERE is the postscript of a letter from Will S. Hofford, a Camp-Fire member from the Pacific Coast, who stopped off to see me on his way back to England to enlist. He was, when he wrote, a lieutenant in the 17th Royal Scots.

There are, by the way, hundreds of our identification-cards in the big war.

> I still carry your card No.—. My brother Bob has, I believe,—or—, and he has been in the trenches in France now since February, 1915. He has had his share of the fighting ever since then and so far has not received a scratch—only about one-third of his regiment is left.

INFORMATION DIRECTORY

IMPORTANT: Only items like those below can be printed—standing sources of information. No room on this page to ask or answer specific questions. Recommend no source of information you are not *sure* of. False information may cause serious loss, even loss of life. *Adventure* does its best to make this directory reliable, but assumes no responsibility therefor.

For data on the Amazon country write Algot Lange, care U. S. Consul, Para, Brazil. Replies only if stamped, addressed envelope is enclosed and only at Mr. Lange's discretion, this service being purely voluntary. (Five cents postage in this case.)

For the Banks fisheries, Frederick William Wallace, editor *Canadian Fisherman*, 35 St. Alexander St., Montreal. Same conditions as above.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii and Alaska, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

For Adventurers' Club, get data from this magazine.

For The American Legion, The Secretary, The American Legion, 10 Bridge St., New York.

Mail Address and Forwarding.—This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

For cabin-boat and small boat travel on the Mississippi and its tributaries, "The Cabin-Boat Primer," by Raymond S. Spears; A. R. Harding, Publisher, Columbus, O., $1.00.

National School Camp Ass'n; address its Sec'y, 1 Broadway, New York.

Red-Headed Regiment, address this magazine.

Arthur Sullivant Hoffman.

WANTED —MEN

NOTE.—We offer this corner of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to our readers. Naturally we can not vouch for any of the letters, the writers thereof, or any of the claims set forth therein, beyond the fact that we receive and publish these letters in good faith. We reserve the privilege of not publishing any letters or parts of a letter. Any inquiry for men sent to this magazine will be considered as intended for publication, at our discretion, in this department, with all names and addresses given therein printed in full, unless such inquiry contains contrary instructions. In the latter case we reserve the right to substitute for real names any numbers or other names. We are ready to forward mail through this office, but assume no responsibility therefor. **N.B.—Items asking for money rather than men will not be published.**

AM NOW organizing a cooperative submarine expedition to attempt the recovery of $3,000,000 from two wrecks that I know of. I need two sober, reliable, adventurous young men to complete my crew. Ability to handle engine, boat and diving apparatus desirable, but not absolutely essential. No drinking men wanted. Those selected will not be expected to aid financially, as funds are being procured through cooperative organization. Crew will share in profits on equitable basis.—CAPT. F. T. WOOD, 501 Plymouth Court, Chicago, Ill.

PHOTOGRAPHER and writer with outfit; first-class automobile driver with car; camera man with moving-picture camera and raw film, to tour North and South America with me. May be forced to store car at times. Must be gentlemen, no boozers, and men that can keep their head at all times and face danger. I will furnish expenses after one month. Start April 1st from Omaha.—Address E. SATTERLEY, care MRS. ELLA SHUCK, Omaha, Nebr.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

YOUNG man wanted to go with me to New Mexico. Have wintered in New York and am returning in April. One who is not averse to holding down a homestead and can stand his share of expenses.—Address M. D., care *Adventure.*

PARTNER to accompany me into interior of South America. Must not be afraid of roughing it, etc. I am acquainted with the country and am offering a good opportunity for the right man.—Address CAPT. GEORGE ASH, Gen. Del., Montgomery, Ala.

FOUR or five men, 22 to 25 yrs., to go with me on the sea trail from San Pedro to the coast of Chile on a scientific and educational motion-picture-taking cruise, exploring islands, etc. Square-minded lads of grit and patience are needed. Your own expenses and comradeship is all that's asked. A share of the profits is yours.—Address LES BENTLEY, San Pedro, Cal.

INFORMATION desired from some one who has traveled in a van-covered wagon, gipsy cart or similar vehicle, in New England, Maritime Provinces or country with like climate and characteristics. I want details as to best sort of wagon for comfortable living, not speed; utensils for comfort, not luxury; best or most interesting country to travel through, *i. e.*, coast or inland, valley or mountain; as to natives—whether inclined to be friendly or not, etc. Also expense of trip in such a vehicle estimated by the week. Any information will be greatly appreciated.—Address M. D. M., care *Adventure.*

YOUNG man between 21 and 35. Some one who has roughed it, can handle fire arms and be depended on in a tight corner, to join me on a hunting, fishing, trapping and prospecting trip through Western America and Mexico. Must be able to outfit himself and go fifty-fifty on the grub-stake. Tell me everything in your first letter.—Address BILLY CHAVON,, 215 Beaufait Ave., Detroit, Mich.

TWO good men to prospect and hunt in Arizona. Experienced men only, between 25 and 40. No boozers or bums, honest in all dealings and be able to furnish their own outfit and expenses. Those with knowledge of Arizona preferred.—Address R. A. BRANNON, 3134 N. 12th St., Philadelphia, Pa.

IF ANY of the interested parties who went about four years ago from Los Angeles, or San Diego, Cal., in the S. S. *Eureka* to Akapala, Honduras, and had to return without being able to succeed in their quest will communicate with the undersigned, giving him further particulars, they may be able to get what they were after with very little trouble.—Address W 310, care *Adventnre.*

PARTNER, one owning seaworthy boat for trip around South America, and later Africa. Am American, 46. Been around the world once, and still going.—Address B. R. JOHNSTON, 700 Camp St., New Orleans, La.

TWO or three men to take trip into Central Alaska or Northern British Columbia in early Spring for hunting, prospecting, probably locating trapping for following Winter. Know the country thoroughly, outfit, needs, etc. A trip that will never be forgotten.—Address W 311, care *Adventure.*

LOST TRAILS

NOTE.—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

BUTLER, JACK (Ormondi) of Philadelphia. Last heard from in Boston, Mass., 1913. Expert mechanic and free lance. We were pals in Turkey, Persia, South and East Africa, Egypt, India, Australia and South America. Foreign Legion in Mexico. He saved my life in Labrador in 1909.—Address RUSCH BOUCHER, 291 Valparaiso, Chile.

OWEN, G. P. Native of Maine. Wounded in scrap with Insurrecto Capt. Alapap in Maranduque, P. I., 1902. Gunnery expert U. S. N. Inventor of bore-sighting device. Supposedly in France as mechanician with Air Fleet. Address wanted in regard to Manila property.—WELLES & WELLES, Law Office, Bremerton, Wash.

ELIAS, JAMES, Allegheny, Pa., John Kenny, Pittsburg, Pa. and Henry Miller, Detroit, Mich., who served in Co. B, 19th U. S. Inf. in Porto Rico, 1899, please send addresses.—PATRICK H. GREELY, San Lorenzo, Grant Co., N. M.

MOORE, FRANK L., last heard from in Seattle, Wash. about three years ago. 21 yrs., 5 ft. 8 in., 150 lbs.; brown eyes; fair complexion; light hair. His mother inquires.—Address MRS. MARY A. MOORE, 1113 Sheridan St., Danville, Ill.

LOUNSBURY, HERBERT HARLEY (*alias* Peter Sterling). Initials P. A. tattooed on right forearm. Cowpuncher and clerk. Last employed as salesman for Armour & Co., Chicago, Ill. 1913. Worked, Smith's Ranch, a few miles south of Livingston, Mont., 1910. 28 yrs., 5 ft. 9 in., 135 lbs.; hair, brown; eyes, dark blue; smooth shaven; medium complexion; small wart on right nostril.—Address B. L. MATTHEWS, Box 236, Los Angeles, Cal.

HEYER, MILTON ALBERT, last heard from Fargo, N. D., 1909. Eyes and hair, brown; 6 ft., 29 yrs. Five dollars reward paid for his address or conclusive proof of death.—Address ROY W. HEYER, R. D. No. 2, Nazareth, Pa.

ALLEN, ROBERT N., formerly of Foreign Legion. Last heard from with Villa in Mexico. I soldiered with him in China and am very anxious to get in touch with him.—JAMES BLY, Marine Barracks, Paris Is., South Carolina.

McLAUGHLIN, DR. C. H. Late of Canton, O. Last heard of somewhere in Cuba. Florida Everglades pal wants news.—Address R. E. ELDRED, Box 349, Battle Creek, Mich.

ELLIOT, ROBERT (Bob). Last heard from working at Ehrman's Hotel, Kalamazoo, Mich. Thought to have gone to South Bend, Ind.—Address Mrs. Wm. Foster, 1110 Dovercourt Road, Toronto, Canada.

"JEW SAM" (last name forgotten), a gambler, who left Colon, Panama, February, 1911 on his way to Nicaragua or Honduras. Not important, merely curiosity prompts this inquiry.—Address E. Madden, care *Adventure.*

Inquiries will be printed three times. In the January and July issues all unfound back names will be printed again.

MORINE, COL. CHARLES A. of South America, write to me.—Address Guy M. Shepherd, Bizbee, Ariz.

OLD comrades of A Co., American Insurrectos, during 1910-11.—Address Guy M. Shepherd, Bizbee, Ariz.

HOLLAND, FRANK. Left Lebanon, Pa. about a year ago, presumably for 'Frisco. Write your old chum.—William Stengle, S. S. *Dakotan*, American Hawaiian S. S. Co., San Francisco, Cal.

BROWNELL, RICHARD and Robert Marshall who hunted animals in Africa for Barnum and Bailey's show.—Address E. F. Foster, R. R. No. 1, Asbury, Mo.

BOULTON, FREDERICK E., last heard from Belfast, Ireland, 1880. His brother inquires.—Address Alf A. Boulton, R. R. No. 1, Box 18A, Evansville, Ind. Canadian papers please copy.

RIDER, WILLIAM, my brother. Served in Philippines as cook and corporal in G Co., 41st U. S. Vol., 1900.—Address John Rider, Supervising Internal Revenue Agent, San Fernando, Pampanga, P. I.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

SUMMERS, THOMAS M., brother, last heard from in 158th Co., C. A. C. 6 ft., 185 lbs.; light hair; blue eyes.—Address B. F. SUMMERS, Co. L. Signal Corps, Ft. Wm. McKinley, Rizal, P. I.

PINNEY, BERTIE or George Bert Pinney, last heard of at Waukesha, Wisc., 1898, 1899. Was adopted by John Foote of Waukesha, Wisc.—Address Fred Pinney, care W. I. Whipple, R. No. 2, Liberal, Mo.

EVANS, FRANK. Communicate with me at once regarding old L—— A—— mine, spoken of in B—— W——, Texas.—Address H. R. Ross, 2702 Montana St., Oakland, Cal.

DAWNIE, GEORGE M., in the battle of Macul, Philippines, 1904, or any of my comrades of the 17th B. T. A.—Address (Mush) Oscar L. Robinson, 3916 Sawyer Ave., Chicago, Ill.

GATTEY, CAPT. G. G., 1901-'04, write to one of your "Up the Rio Grande after Ali" comrades.—Address (Mush) Oscar L. Robinson, 3916 N. Sawyer Ave., Chicago, Ill.

SMEDEGARD, JAMES, left Whittlesea, Wisc., 1906. Has not been heard from since. Age 30. Mother inquires.—Address Mrs. L. B. Smedegard, Box 6, Whittlesea, Wisc.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In the January and July issues all unfound back names will be printed again.

SHARPE, MELBURN (Curly), brother. Last heard of in Iditarod, Alaska. 5 ft. 8 in.; 180 lbs.—Address A. G. Sharpe, Canacao, *via* Cavite, P. I.

McGUIRE, THOMAS JAMES, last heard of working in mining-camp west of Tuscan, Cal.—Address John M. McGuire, Kirkland Lake, Tough Okes Mine, Ont., Canada.

JAME, J. R., my half-brother. Last heard of in Springfield, Ill.—Address, M. H. Cox, Darlington, Ind.

RECKLESS, we are anxiously waiting to hear from you. Please write.—Address L. T. 258, care *Adventure.*

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the February or March issues of *Adventure.* They can get name of inquirer from this magazine.

AMMANN, JOSEPH, Grand Is., Nebr.; Anderson, Joe, Discharged U. S. Army Hospital Corps, Manila, P. I., 1901; Aniba, or Kennedy, Alfred; Ashenfelter, Lloyd E.; Avery, J. F., Ramseur, N. C.; Basye, Thomas T.; Benson, George D., Philippines, 1899; Bly, Royal R. (Richard or Dick) Spokane, Wash., 1909; Brown, Marion M., Portland, Me.; Burnett, Alice; Cain, G. W.; Carroll, Martin; Clough, Mr. & Mrs. Frank, British Honduras, 1910; Cuff, Mart, Panama, 1912-13; Cumery, Bessie; De Brenil, Aramand; Denson, John, Hozen, Ark.; Downer, Simon (Tom), Lincoln Nebr. 1909-10; Downer, Vearne; Dyer, Michael; Ethridge, Mrs. Celia; Fallett, Bob; Flewelling, Ernest; Finley, Sam, Tonopah, Nev., 1909; Frain, James, (deaf mute), St. Louis, 1875; Frain, Roderick, Cripple Creek, Colo.; Freeman, Al, Chapman, Kansas, 1898; Gardner, Frank, formerly A Troop, 8th Cav., Ft. Meade, S. D.; Garnache, William J.; Hampton, Paul; Hiliman, Frank, Winnipeg, Can., 1911; Hines, Ralph ("Shorty Hines"); Hoffman, Frank L.; Johnson, James Belton, St. Louis, Mo., 1868; Knight, Joe (cop); Logue, Dan., St. Paul, Minn., 1910; Long, John Wesley, Canada; McKay, Raymond; Mason, Joseph Ernest; Moore, J. A. (Jack) Tremedoc, North Wales, Eng.; Niell, H. (Nielson); Pickens, Osmer; Randall, W. S.; Rogers, George John; Seton, Capt. Robert Arthur, Venezuela 1899; Sheern, Thomas Eugene, Spakspeare, N. M., 1888; Sparhawk, Harvey & Emma; Starnes, Edwin G.; Swarm, E. A.; Thompson, Jim F. ("Cyclone Beachnut Jimmy"); Thomas, Willis I, Los Angeles, 1913-14; Tippit, W. A. (Arthur); Vinay Julius, U. S. S. *Crocus*, Buffalo; Wheeler, Joseph Harry, Milwaukee, 1886; Zappert, Walter.

MISCELLANEOUS—Courish, Andrew, Dona Ana, N. M., 1898. Also Mike Grace somewhere Rocky Mts., 1900 and Frank Whelan, Calif., 1913; Boys of Troop 9, 13th U. S. Cav. 1908-11. Also those in Parhm & Dean Lumber Camp, N. Brownville, Me., Winter of 1913; Comrade, B Co., 7th Inf., Jan. 15, 1897 to Oct. 27, 1898.

MANUSCRIPTS sent us by the following are being held by us, having been returned to us as unclaimed at the addresses furnished:

W. Lynch, Trenton, N. J.; Henry W. Edwards, New York; W. G. Gormley, Ontario, Canada; George Stillons, Chicago, Ill.; Francis Manston, Chicago, Cal.; James Perry, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Edward Weston, Rochester, N. Y.

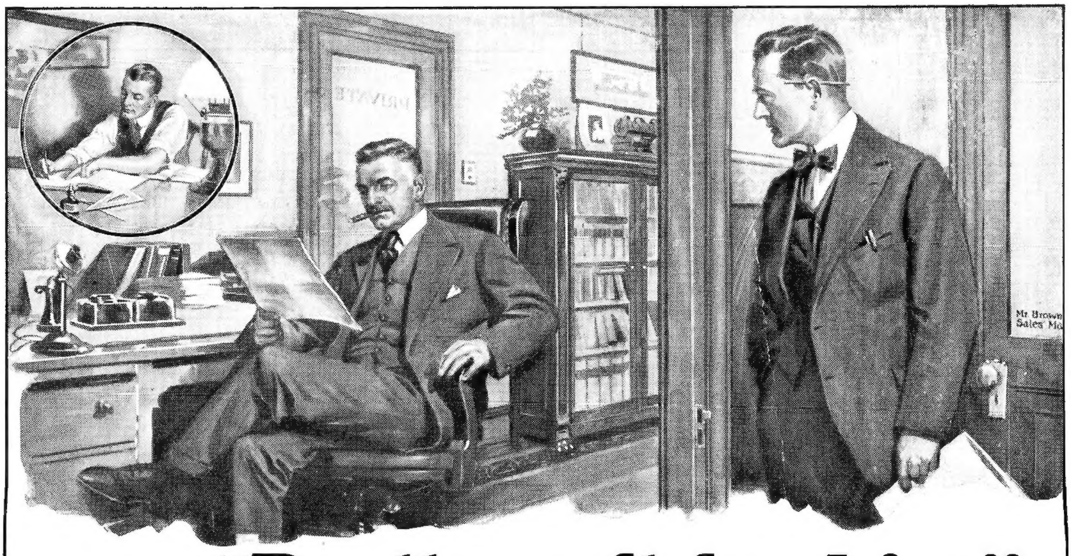
RANDOLPH H. ATKIN, S. N. Morgan, Christian A. Damm, please send us your present addresses. Mail sent to you at addresses given us doesn't reach you.—Address A. S. Hoffman, care *Adventure.*

NUMBERS 56, 68, 73, 76, W 93, W 167, W 140, W 150, W 153, W 183, W 184, W 189, W 195, W 203, W 211, W 212, W 215, W 231, W 250, C 189, C 205, L. T. 207, L. T. 284, C 293. Please send us your present addresses. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address A. S. Hoffman, care *Adventure.*

THE TRAIL AHEAD

In addition to those stories mentioned on page 2, the following at present are scheduled for the May issue of *Adventure,* out April 3rd.

SOME FISHING!	***Frederick William Wallace***
UNDER THE SKIN	***George L. Catton***
BILLY JUNE AND THE MAN GOING OUT	***Wilbur Hall***
RED FLANNEL	***Charles Brown, Jr.***
RIDING STEEL	***E. E. Harriman***
A YAVAPAI YARN	***Harold Titus***
PATRICK PEGAN KELLY, HEAD-HUNTER	***Hays Bell***
THE CASHIER	***W. A. Macdonald***
THE STORY OF A PIEBALD HORSE. An Article	***General Ben. J. ViIJoen***
THE DRUNKEN GOD	***Charles J. Sullivan***
PARADISE BEND. Part III.	***William Patterson White***



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☐ Gas Engineer
☐ CIVIL ENGINEER
☐ Surveying and Mapping
☐ MINE FOREMAN OR ENGINEER
☐ Metallurgist or Prospector
☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER
☐ Marine Engineer
☐ ARCHITECT
☐ Contractor and Builder
☐ Architectural Draftsman
☐ Concrete Builder
☐ Structural Engineer
☐ PLUMBING AND HEATING
☐ Sheet Metal Worker
☐ SALESMANSHIP
☐ ADVERTISING MAN
☐ Window Trimmer
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☐ ILLUSTRATOR
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☐ BOOKKEEPER
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☐ Railway Accountant
☐ Commercial Law
☐ GOOD ENGLISH
☐ Teacher
☐ Common School Subjects
☐ CIVIL SERVICE
☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ AGRICULTURE
☐ POULTRY RAISING
☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.
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